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THE WORKS

OF

HENRIK IBSEN

LADY INGER OF ÖSTRÅT

THE FEAST AT SOLHOUG

LOVE'S COMEDY

WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY

WILLIAM ARCHER

AND

C. H. HERFORD, Litt. D., M. A.

THE VIKINGS AT HELGELAND

THE PRETENDERS

WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY

WILLIAM ARCHER

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CONTENTS

PAGE

GENERAL PREFACE vii

INTRODUCTION TO "LADY INGER OF ÖSTRÅT" . . 3

"LADY INGER OF ÖSTRÅT" 19
Translated by CHARLES ARCHER

INTRODUCTION TO "THE FEAST AT SOLHOUG" . . 191

AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO "THE FEAST AT SOLHOUG" . 196

"THE FEAST AT SOLHOUG" 205
Translated by WILLIAM ARCHER and MARY MORRISON

INTRODUCTION TO "LOVE'S COMEDY" 293

"LOVE'S COMEDY" 305
Translated by C. H. HERFORD

LADY INGER OF ÖSTRÅT

LADY INGER OF ÖSTRÅT

INTRODUCTION*

HENRIK JOHAN IBSEN was born on March 20, 1828, at the little seaport of Skien, situated at the head of a long fiord on the south coast of Norway. His great-great-grandfather was a Dane who settled in Bergen about 1720. His great-grandmother, Wenche Dischington, was the daughter of a Scotchman, who had settled and become naturalised in Norway; and Ibsen himself was inclined to ascribe some of his characteristics to the Scottish strain in his blood. Both his grandmother (Plesner by name) and his mother, Maria Cornelia Altenburg, were of German descent. It has been said that there was not a drop of Norwegian blood in Ibsen's composition; but it is doubtful whether this statement can be substantiated. Most of his male ancestors were sailors; but his father, Knud Ibsen, was a merchant. When Henrik (his first child) was born, he seems to have been prosperous, and to have led a very social and perhaps rather extravagant life. But when the poet was eight years old, financial disaster overtook the family, and they had to withdraw to a comparatively small farm-house on the outskirts of the little town, where they lived in poverty and retirement.

As a boy, Ibsen appears to have been lacking in animal spirits and the ordinary childish taste for games.

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Our chief glimpses of his home life are due to his sister Hedvig, the only one of his family with whom, in after years, he maintained any intercourse, and whose name he gave to one of his most beautiful creations.[1] She relates that the only outdoor amusement he cared for was "building"—in what material does not appear. Among indoor diversions, that to which he was most addicted was conjuring, a younger brother serving as his confederate. We also hear of his cutting out fantastically-dressed figures in paste-board, attaching them to wooden blocks, and ranging them in groups or tableaux. He may be said, in short, to have had a toy theatre without the stage. In all these amusements, it is possible, with a little goodwill, to divine the coming dramatist—the constructive faculty, the taste for technical legerdemain (which made him in his youth so apt a disciple of Scribe), and the fundamental passion for manipulating fictitious characters. The education he received was of the most ordinary, but included a little Latin. The subjects which chiefly interested him were history and religion. He showed no special literary proclivities, though a dream which he narrated in a school composition so impressed his master that he accused him (much to the boy's indignation) of having copied it out of some book.

His chief taste was for drawing, and he was anxious to become an artist, but his father could not afford to pay for his training.[2] At the age of fifteen, therefore,

[1] See Introduction to *The Wild Duck*.

[2] He continued to dabble in painting until he was thirty, or thereabouts.

he had to set about earning his living, and was apprenticed to an apothecary in Grimstad, a town on the south-west coast of Norway, between Arendal and Christianssand. He was here in even narrower social surroundings than at Skien. His birthplace numbered some 3,000 inhabitants, Grimstad about 800. That he was contented with his lot cannot be supposed; and the short, dark, taciturn youth seems to have made an unsympathetic and rather uncanny impression upon the burghers of the little township. His popularity was not heightened by a talent which he presently developed for drawing caricatures and writing personal lampoons. He found, however, two admiring friends in Christopher Lorentz Due, a custom-house clerk, and a law student named Olë Schulerud.

The first political event which aroused his interest and stirred him to literary expression was the French Revolution of 1848. He himself writes:[1] "The times were much disturbed. The February revolution, the rising in Hungary and elsewhere, the Slesvig War—all this had a strong and ripening effect on my development, immature though it remained both then and long afterwards. I wrote clangorous poems of encouragement to the Magyars, adjuring them, for the sake of freedom and humanity, not to falter in their righteous war against 'the tyrants'; and I composed a long series of sonnets to King Oscar, mainly, so far as I remember, urging him to set aside all petty considerations, and march without delay, at the head of his army, to the assistance of our Danish brothers on the Slesvig

[1] Preface to the second edition of *Catilina*. 1875.

frontier." The series of sonnets, and one of the poems "To Hungary!" have been published in the poet's *Literary Remains.* About the same time he was reading for his matriculation examination at Christiania University, where he proposed to study medicine; and it happened that the Latin books prescribed were Sallust's *Catiline* and Cicero's *Catilinarian Orations.* "I devoured these documents," says Ibsen, "and a few months later my drama [*Catilina*] was finished." His friend Schulerud took it to Christiania, to offer it to the theatre and to the publishers. By both it was declined. Schulerud, however, had it printed at his own expense; and soon after its appearance, in the early spring of 1850, Ibsen himself came to Christiania.[1]

For the most part written in blank verse, *Catilina* towards the close breaks into rhyming trochaic lines of thirteen and fifteen syllables. It is an extremely youthful production, very interesting from the biographical point of view, but of small substantive merit. What is chiefly notable in it, perhaps, is the fact that it already shows Ibsen occupied with the theme which was to run through so many of his works—the contrast between two types of womanhood, one strong and resolute, even to criminality, the other comparatively weak, clinging, and "feminine" in the conventional sense of the word.

In Christiania Ibsen shared Schulerud's lodgings, and his poverty. There is a significant sentence in his pref-

[1] This is his own statement of the order of events. According to Halvdan Koht (*Samlede Værker*, vol. x, p. i) he arrived in Christiania in March, 1850, and *Catilina* did not appear until April.

ace to the re-written *Catilina*, in which he tells how the bulk of the first edition was sold as waste paper, and adds: "In the days immediately following we lacked none of the first necessities of life." He went to a "student-factory," or, as we should say, a "crammer's," managed by one Heltberg; and there he fell in with several of the leading spirits of his generation—notably with Björnson, A. O. Vinje, and Jonas Lie. In the early summer of 1850 he wrote a one-act play, *Kiæmpehöien* (*The Warrior's Barrow*), entirely in the sentimental and somewhat verbose manner of the Danish poet Oehlenschläger. It was accepted by the Christiania Theatre, and performed three times, but cannot have put much money in the poet's purse. With Paul Botten-Hansen and A. O. Vinje he co-operated in the production of a weekly satirical paper, at first entitled *Manden* (*The Man*), but afterwards *Andhrimner*, after the cook of the gods in Valhalla. To this journal, which lasted only from January to September, 1851, he contributed, among other things, a satirical "music-tragedy," entitled *Norma, or a Politician's Love*.[1] As the circulation of the paper is said to have been something under a hundred, it cannot have paid its contributors very lavishly. About this time, too, he narrowly escaped arrest on account of some political agitation, in which, however, he had not been very deeply concerned.

Meanwhile a movement had been going forward in the capital of Western Norway, Bergen, which was to have a determining influence on Ibsen's destinies.

[1] The whole three acts are comprised in eight pages of the *Literary Remains* (vol. i).

Up to 1850 there had been practically no Norwegian drama. The two great poets of the first half of the century, Wergeland and Welhaven, had nothing dramatic in their composition, though Wergeland more than once essayed the dramatic form. Danish actors and Danish plays held entire possession of the Christiania Theatre; and, though amateur performances were not uncommon in provincial towns, it was generally held that the Norwegians, as a nation, were devoid of all talent for acting. The very sound of Norwegian (as distinct from Danish) was held by Norwegians themselves to be ridiculous on the stage. Fortunately Olë Bull, the great violinist, was not of that opinion. With the insight of genius, he saw that the time had come for the development of a national drama; he set forth this view in a masterly argument addressed to the Storthing; and he gave practical effect to it by establishing, at his own risk, a Norwegian theatre in Bergen. How rightly he had judged the situation may be estimated from the fact that among the raw lads who first presented themselves for employment was Johannes Brun, afterwards one of the greatest of comedians; while the first "theatre-poet" engaged by the management was none other than Henrik Ibsen.

The theatre was opened on January 2, 1850; Ibsen entered upon his duties (at a salary of less than £70 a year) in November, 1851.[1]

Incredibly, pathetically small, according to our ideas, were the material resources of Bull's gallant enterprise.

[1] The history of Ibsen's connection with the Bergen Theatre is written at some length in an article by me, entitled "Ibsen's Apprenticeship," published in the *Fortnightly Review* for January, 1904. From that article I quote freely in the following pages.

The town of Bergen numbered only 25,000 inhabitants. Performances were given only twice, or, at the outside, three times, a week; and the highest price of admission was two shillings. What can have been attempted in the way of scenery or costumes it is hard to imagine. Of a three-act play, produced in 1852, we read that "the mounting, which cost £22 10*s*., left nothing to be desired."

Ibsen's connection with the Bergen Theatre lasted from November 6, 1851, until the summer of 1857—that is to say, from his twenty-fourth to his thirtieth year. He was engaged in the first instance "to assist the theatre as dramatic author," but in the following year he received from the management a "travelling stipend" of £45 to enable him to study the art of theatrical production in Denmark and Germany, with the stipulation that, on his return, he should undertake the duties of "scene instructor"—that is to say, stage-manager or producer. In this function he seems to have been—as, indeed, he always was—extremely conscientious. A book exists in the Bergen Public Library containing (it is said) careful designs by him for every scene in the plays he produced, and full notes as to entrances, exits, groupings, costumes, accessories, etc. But he was not an animating or inspiring producer. He had none of the histrionic vividness of his successor in the post, Björnstjerne Björnson, who, like all great producers, could not only tell the actors what to do, but show them how to do it. Perhaps it was a sense of his lack of impulse that induced the management to give him a colleague, one Herman Låding, with whom his relations were none of the happiest.

Ibsen is even said, on one occasion, to have challenged Låding to a duel.

One of the duties of the "theatre-poet" was to have a new play ready for each recurrence of the "Foundation Day" of the theatre, January 2. On that date, in 1853, Ibsen produced a romantic comedy, *St. John's Night*, which was first printed in the *Literary Remains* (1909). It is an exceedingly immature work, confused and trivial in intrigue, and for the most part conventional in characterization. Nevertheless it is interesting, inasmuch as it contains the germs of many ideas to which he afterwards returned in his maturer works. In the personage of Julian Paulsen, for example—Ibsen's first essay in satirical character-drawing—we find some traits which reappear in Stensgård, and others which foreshadow Hialmar Ekdal. But it is principally of the Troll-scenes in *Peer Gynt* that we are reminded. One of the poet's aims, it would seem, was to point the contrast between true and false—between sincere and insincere—romanticism. To this end, he shows us a fairy revel on St. John's Night, which is seen in its true colors by the hero and heroine, while the ridiculous Paulsen and his affected inamorata mistake it for a dance of peasants around a bonfire. Moreover, Paulsen, who is really an amusing character, confesses that he was consumed by an ideal passion for the "huldra" or dryad of Northern mythology, until he learned that she was provided with a tail, which shocked his æsthetic sensibilities. Thus at many points we find the poet's mind already moving upon the plane of fantasy to which it was to return fourteen years later in the second and third acts of

Peer Gynt. The play had no success, and was performed only twice. For the next Foundation Day, January 2, 1854, Ibsen prepared a revised version of *The Warrior's Barrow*, already produced in Christiania. A year later, January 2, 1855, *Lady Inger of Östråt* was produced—a work still immature, indeed, but giving, for the first time, no uncertain promise of the master dramatist to come.

In an autobiographical letter to the Danish critic, Peter Hansen, written from Dresden in 1870, Ibsen says: "*Lady Inger of Östråt* is the result of a love-affair—hastily entered into and violently broken off—to which several of my minor poems may also be attributed, such as *Wild-flowers and Pot-plants*, *A Bird-Song*, etc." The heroine of this love-affair can now be identified as a lady named Henrikke Holst, who seems to have preserved through a long life the fresh, bright spirit, the overflowing joyousness, which attracted Ibsen when she was only in her seventeenth year. Their relation was of the most innocent. It went no further than a few surreptitious rambles in the romantic surroundings of Bergen, usually with a somewhat older girl to play propriety, and with a bag of sugar-plums to fill up pauses in the conversation. The "violent" ending seems to have come when the young lady's father discovered the secret of these excursions, and doubtless placed her under more careful control. What there was in this episode to suggest, or in any way influence, *Lady Inger*, I cannot understand. Nevertheless the identification seems quite certain. The affair had a charming little sequel. During

the days of their love's young dream, Ibsen treated the "wild-flower" with a sort of shy and distant chivalry at which the wood-gods must have smiled. He avoided even touching her hand, and always addressed her by the "De" (you) of formal politeness. But when they met again after many years, he a famous poet and she a middle-aged matron, he instinctively adopted the "Du" (thou) of affectionate intimacy, and she responded in kind. He asked her whether she had recognised herself in any of his works, and she replied: "I really don't know, unless it be in the parson's wife in *Love's Comedy*, with her eight children and her perpetual knitting." "Ibsen protested," says Herr Paulsen, in whose *Samliv med Ibsen* a full account of the episode may be read. It is interesting to note that the lady did not recognise herself in Elina Gyldenlöve, any more than we can.

It must have been less than a year after the production of *Lady Inger* that Ibsen made the acquaintance of the lady who was to be his wife. Susanna Dåe Thoresen was a daughter (by his second marriage) of Provost[1] Thoresen, of Bergen, whose third wife, Magdalene Krag, afterwards became an authoress of some celebrity. It is recorded that Ibsen's first visit to the Thoresen household took place on January 7, 1856,[2] and that on that occasion, speaking to Susanna Thoresen, he was suddenly moved to say to her: "You are now Elina, but

[1] Provost ("Provst") is an ecclesiastical title, roughly equivalent to Dean.

[2] See article by Dr. Julius Elias in *Die neue Rundschau*, December, 1906, p. 1463. Dr. Brahm, in the same magazine (p. 1414), writes as though this were Ibsen's first meeting with his wife; and a note by Halvdan Koht, in the Norwegian edition of Ibsen's Letters,

in time you will become Lady Inger." Twenty years later, at Christmas, 1876, he gave his wife a copy of the German translation of *Lady Inger*, with the following inscription on the fly-leaf:

> "This book is by right indefeasible thine,
> Who in spirit art born of the Östråt line."

In *Lady Inger* Ibsen has chosen a theme from the very darkest hour of Norwegian history. King Sverre's democratic monarchy, dating from the beginning of the thirteenth century, had paralysed the old Norwegian nobility. One by one the great families died out, their possessions being concentrated in the hands of the few survivors, who regarded their wealth as a privilege unhampered by obligations. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, then, patriotism and public spirit were almost dead among the nobles, while the monarchy, before which the old aristocracy had fallen, was itself dead, or rather merged (since 1380) in the Crown of Denmark. The peasantry, too, had long ago lost all effective voice in political affairs; so that Norway lay prone and inert at the mercy of her Danish rulers. It is at the moment of deepest national degradation that Ibsen has placed his tragedy; and the degradation was, in fact, even deeper than he represents it, for the longings for freedom, the

seems to bear out this view. But it would appear that what Fru Ibsen told Dr. Elias was that on the date mentioned Ibsen "for the first time visited at her father's house." The terms of the anecdote almost compel us to assume that he had previously met her elsewhere. It seems almost inconceivable that Ibsen, of all people, should have made such a speech to a lady on their very first meeting.

stirrings of revolt, which form the motive-power of the action, are invented, or at any rate idealised, by the poet. Fru Inger Ottisdatter Gyldenlöve was, in fact, the greatest personage of her day in Norway. She was the best-born, the wealthiest, and probably the ablest woman in the land. At the time when Ibsen wrote, little more than this seems to have been known of her; so that in making her the victim of a struggle between patriotic duty and maternal love, he was perhaps poetising in the absence of positive evidence, rather than in opposition to it. Subsequent research, unfortunately, has shown that Fru Inger was but little troubled with patriotic aspirations. She was a hard and grasping woman, ambitious of social power and predominance, but inaccessible, or nearly so, to national feeling. It was from sheer social ambition, and with no qualms of patriotic conscience, that she married her daughters to Danish noblemen. True, she lent some support to the insurrection of the so-called "Dale-junker," a peasant who gave himself out as the heir of Sten Sture, a former regent of Sweden; but there is not a tittle of ground for making this pretender her son. He might, indeed, have become her son-in-law, for, speculating on his chances of success, she had betrothed one of her daughters to him. Thus the Fru Inger of Ibsen's play is, in her character and circumstances, as much a creation of the poet's as though no historic personage of that name had ever existed. Olaf Skaktavl, Nils Lykke, and Elina Gyldenlöve are also historic names; but with them, too, Ibsen has dealt with the utmost freedom. The real Nils Lykke was married in 1528 to the real Elina Gylden-

löve. She died four years later, leaving him two children; and thereupon he would fain have married her sister Lucia. Such a union, however, was regarded as incestuous, and the lovers failed in their effort to obtain a special dispensation. Lucia then became her brother-in-law's mistress, and bore him a son. But the ecclesiastical law was in those days not to be trifled with; Nils Lykke was thrown into prison for his crime, condemned, and killed in his dungeon, in the year of grace 1535. Thus there was a tragedy ready-made in Ibsen's material, though it was not the tragedy he chose to write.

The Bergen public did not greatly take to *Lady Inger*, and it was performed, in its novelty, only twice. Nor is the reason far to seek. The extreme complexity of the intrigue, and the lack of clear guidance through its mazes, probably left the Bergen audiences no less puzzled than the London audiences who saw the play at the Scala Theatre in 1906.[1] It is a play which can be appreciated only by spectators who know it beforehand. Such audiences it has often found in Norway, where it was revived at the Christiania Theatre in 1875; but in Denmark and Germany, though it has been produced several times, it has never been very successful. We need go no further than the end of the first act to understand the reason. On an audience which knows nothing of the play, the sudden appearance of a "Stranger," to whose identity it has not the slightest clue, can pro-

[1] Stage Society performances, January 28 and 29, 1906. Lady Inger was played by Miss Edyth Olive, Elina by Miss Alice Crawford, Nils Lykke by Mr. Henry Ainley, Olaf Skaktavl by Mr. Alfred Brydone, and Nils Stenssön by Mr. Harcourt Williams.

duce no effect save one of bewilderment. To rely on such an incident for what was evidently intended to be a thrilling "curtain," was to betray extreme inexperience; and this single trait is typical of much in the play. Nevertheless *Lady Inger* marks a decisive advance in Ibsen's development. It marks, one may say, the birth of his power of invention. He did not as yet know how to restrain or clarify his invention, and he made clumsy use of the stock devices of a bad school. But he had once for all entered upon that course of technical training which it took him five-and-twenty years to complete. He was learning much that he was afterwards to unlearn; but had he not undergone this apprenticeship, he would never have been the master he ultimately became.

When Ibsen entered upon his duties at the Bergen Theatre, the influence of Eugène Scribe and his imitators was at its very height. Of the one hundred and forty-five plays produced during his tenure of office, more than half (seventy-five) were French, twenty-one being by Scribe himself, and at least half the remainder by adepts of his school, Bayard, Dumanoir, Mélesville, etc. It is to this school that Ibsen, in *Lady Inger*, proclaims his adherence; and he did not finally shake off its influence until he wrote the Third Act of *A Doll's House* in 1879. Although the romantic environment of the play, and the tragic intensity of the leading character, tend to disguise the relationship, there can be no doubt that *Lady Inger* is, in essence, simply a French drama of intrigue, constructed after the method of Scribe, as exemplified in *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, *Les Contes de la Reine*

de Navarre,[1] and a dozen other French plays, with the staging of which the poet was then occupied. It might seem that the figure of Elina, brooding over the thought of her dead sister, coffined in the vault below the banqueting-hall, belonged rather to German romanticism; but there are plenty of traces of German romanticism even in the French plays with which the good people of Bergen were regaled. For the suggestion of grave-vaults and coffined heroines, for example, Ibsen need have gone no further than Dumas's *Catherine Howard*, which he produced in March, 1853. I do not, however, pretend that his romantic colouring came to him from France. It came to him, doubtless, from Germany, by way of Denmark. My point is that the conduct of the intrigue in *Lady Inger* shows the most unmistakable marks of his study of the great French plot-manipulators. Its dexterity and its artificiality alike are neither German nor Danish, but French. Ibsen had learnt the great secret of Scribe—the secret of dramatic movement. The play is full of those ingenious complications, mistakes of identity, and rapid turns of fortune by which Scribe enchained the interest of his audiences. Its central theme—a mother plunging into intrigue and crime for the advancement of her son, only to find that her son himself has been her victim—is as old as Greek tragedy. The secondary story, too—that of Elina's wild infatuation for the betrayer and practically the murderer of her sister—could probably be paralleled in the ballad litera-

[1] These two plays were produced, respectively, in March and October, 1854, at the very time when Ibsen must have been planning and composing *Lady Inger*.

ture of Scotland, Germany, or Denmark, and might, indeed, have been told, in verse or prose, by Sir Walter Scott. But these very un-Parisian elements are handled in a fundamentally Parisian fashion, and Ibsen is clearly fascinated, for the time, by the ideal of what was afterwards to be known as the "well-made play." The fact that the result is in reality an ill-made play in no way invalidates this theory. It is perhaps the final condemnation of the well-made play that in nine cases out of ten —and even in the hands of far more experienced playwrights than the young Bergen "theatre-poet"—it is apt to prove ill-made after all.

Far be it from me, however, to speak in pure disparagement of *Lady Inger*. With all its defects, it seems to me manifestly the work of a great poet—the only one of Ibsen's plays prior to *The Vikings at Helgeland* of which this can be said. It may be that early impressions mislead me; but I still cannot help seeing in Lady Inger a figure of truly tragic grandeur; in Nils Lykke one of the few really seductive seducers in literature; and in many passages of the dialogue, the touch of a master hand.

W. A.

LADY INGER OF ÖSTRÅT

(1855)

CHARACTERS

LADY INGER OTTISDAUGHTER RÖMER, *widow of High Steward Nils Gyldenlöve.*
ELINA GYLDENLÖVE, *her daughter.*
NILS LYKKE, *Danish knight and councillor.*
OLAF SKAKTAVL, *an outlawed Norwegian noble.*
NILS STENSSON.
JENS BIELKE, *Swedish commander.*
BIÖRN, *majordomo at Östråt.*
FINN, *a servant.*
EINAR HUK, *bailiff at Östråt.*
Servants, peasants, and Swedish men-at-arms.

The action takes place at Östråt Manor, on the Trondhiem Fiord, in the year 1528.

[PRONUNCIATION OF NAMES.—Östråt = *Östrot;* Elina (Norwegian, Eline) = *Eleena;* Stensson = *Staynson;* Biörn = *Byörn;* Jens Bielke = *Yens Byelke;* Huk = *Hook.* The *g*'s in "Inger" and in "Gyldenlöve" are, of course, hard. The final *e*'s and the *ö*'s pronounced much as in German.]

LADY INGER OF ÖSTRÅT

DRAMA IN FIVE ACTS

ACT FIRST

A room at Östråt. Through an open door in the back, the Banquet Hall is seen in faint moonlight, which shines fitfully through a deep bow-window in the opposite wall. To the right, an entrance-door; further forward, a curtained window. On the left, a door leading to the inner rooms; further forward a large open fireplace, which casts a glow over the room. It is a stormy evening.

BIÖRN *and* FINN *are sitting by the fireplace. The latter is occupied in polishing a helmet. Several pieces of armour lie near them, along with a sword and shield.*

FINN.

[*After a pause.*] Who was Knut[1] Alfson?

BIÖRN.

My Lady says he was the last of Norway's knighthood.

FINN.

And the Danes killed him at Oslo-fiord?

[1] Pronounce *Knoot.*

BIÖRN.

If you know not that, ask any child of five.

FINN.

So Knut Alfson was the last of our knighthood? And now he's dead and gone! [*Holds up the helmet.*] Well, thou must e'en be content to hang scoured and bright in the Banquet Hall; for what art thou now but an empty nut-shell? The kernel—the worms have eaten that many a winter agone.

What say you, Biörn—may not one call Norway's land an empty nut-shell, even like the helmet here; bright without, worm-eaten within?

BIÖRN.

Hold your peace, and mind your task!—Is the helmet ready?

FINN.

It shines like silver in the moonlight.

BIÖRN.

Then put it by.—See here; scrape the rust off the sword.

FINN.

[*Turning the sword over and examining it.*] Is it worth while?

BIÖRN.

What mean you?

FINN.

The edge is gone.

BIÖRN.

What's that to you? Give it me.—Here, take the shield.

FINN.

[*As before.*] There is no grip to it!

BIÖRN.

[*Mutters.*] Let me get a grip on y o u——

[FINN *hums to himself for a while.*

BIÖRN.

What now?

FINN.

An empty helmet, a sword with no edge, a shield with no grip—so it has all come to that. Who can blame Lady Inger if she leaves such weapons to hang scoured and polished on the walls, instead of rusting them in Danish blood?

BIÖRN.

Folly! Is there not peace in the land?

FINN.

Peace? Ay, when the peasant has shot away his last arrow, and the wolf has reft the last lamb from the fold, then is there peace between them. But 'tis a strange friendship. Well, well; let that pass. 'Tis fitting, as I said, that the harness hang bright in the hall; for you know the old saw: "Call none a man but the knightly man." So now that we have never a knight in the land,

we have never a man; and where no man is, there must women order things; therefore——

BIÖRN.

Therefore—therefore I bid you hold your foul prate! [*Rises.*

The evening wears on. Enough; you may hang the helmet and armour in the hall again.

FINN.

[*In a low voice.*] Nay, best let it be till to-morrow.

BIÖRN.

What, do you fear the dark?

FINN.

Not by day. And if so be I fear it at even, I am not the only one. Ah, you may look; I tell you in the house-folk's room there is talk of many things. [*Lower.*] They say that, night by night, a tall figure, clad in black, walks the Banquet Hall.

BIÖRN.

Old wives' tales!

FINN.

Ah, but they all swear 'tis true.

BIÖRN.

That I well believe.

FINN.

The strangest of all is that Lady Inger thinks the same——

BIÖRN.

[*Starting.*] Lady Inger? What does she think?

FINN.

What Lady Inger thinks? I warrant few can tell t h a t. But sure it is that she has no rest in her. See you not how day by day she grows thinner and paler? [*Looks keenly at him.*] They say she never sleeps—and that it is because of the black figure——

[*While he is speaking,* ELINA GYLDENLÖVE *has appeared in the half-open door on the left. She stops and listens, unobserved.*

BIÖRN.

And you believe such follies?

FINN.

Well, half and half. There be folk, too, that read things another way. But that is pure malice, I'll be bound.—Hearken, Biörn—know you the song that is going round the country?

BIÖRN.

A song?

FINN.

Ay, 'tis on all folks' lips. 'Tis a shameful scurril thing, for sure; yet it goes prettily. Just listen:

[*Sings in a low voice.*

Dame Inger sitteth in Östråt fair,
She wraps her in costly furs—

She decks her in velvet and ermine and vair,
Red gold are the beads that she twines in her hair—
But small peace in that soul of hers.

Dame Inger hath sold her to Denmark's lord.
She bringeth her folk 'neath the stranger's yoke—
In guerdon whereof——

[BIÖRN *enraged, seizes him by the throat.* ELINA GYLDENLÖVE *withdraws without having been seen.*

BIÖRN.

I will send you guerdonless to the foul fiend, if you prate of Lady Inger but one unseemly word more.

FINN.

[*Breaking from his grasp.*] Why—did *I* make the song? [*The blast of a horn is heard from the right.*

BIÖRN.

Hark—what is that?

FINN.

A horn. Then there come guests to-night.

BIÖRN.

[*At the window.*] They are opening the gate. I hear the clatter of hoofs in the courtyard. It must be a knight.

FINN.

A knight? Nay, that can scarce be.

BIÖRN.

Why not?

FINN.

Did you not say yourself: the last of our knighthood is dead and gone? [*Goes out to the right.*

BIÖRN.

The accursed knave, with his prying and peering! What avails all my striving to hide and hush things? They whisper of her even now—; soon all men will be shouting aloud that——

ELINA.

[*Comes in again through the door on the left; looks round her, and says with suppressed emotion:*] Are you alone, Biörn?

BIÖRN.

Is it you, Mistress Elina?

ELINA.

Come, Biörn, tell me one of your stories; I know you can tell others than those that——

BIÖRN.

A story? Now—so late in the evening——?

ELINA.

If you count from the time when it grew dark at Östråt, then 'tis late indeed.

BIÖRN.

What ails you? Has aught crossed you? You seem so restless.

ELINA.

Maybe so.

BIÖRN.

There is something amiss. I have hardly known you this half year past.

ELINA.

Bethink you: this half year past my dearest sister Lucia has been sleeping in the vault below.

BIÖRN.

That is not all, Mistress Elina—it is not that alone that makes you now thoughtful and white and silent, now restless and ill at ease, as you are to-night.

ELINA.

Not that alone, you think? And wherefore not? Was she not gentle and pure and fair as a summer night? Biörn,—I tell you, Lucia was dear to me as my life. Have you forgotten how many a time, when we were children, we sat on your knee in the winter evenings? You sang songs to us, and told us tales——

BIÖRN.

Ay, then you were blithe and gay.

ELINA.

Ah, then, Biörn! Then I lived a glorious life in fable-land, and in my own imaginings. Can it be that the

sea-strand was naked then as now? If it was so, I knew it not. 'Twas there I loved to go weaving all my fair romances; my heroes came from afar and sailed again across the sea; I lived in their midst, and set forth with them when they sailed away. [*Sinks on a chair.*] Now I feel so faint and weary; I can live no longer in my tales. They are only—tales. [*Rising, vehemently.*] Biörn, know you what has made me sick? A truth; a hateful, hateful truth, that gnaws me day and night.

BIÖRN.

What mean you?

ELINA.

Do you remember how sometimes you would give us good counsel and wise saws? Sister Lucia followed them; but I—ah, well-a-day!

BIÖRN.

[*Consoling her.*] Well, well——!

ELINA.

I know it—I was proud, overweening! In all our games, I would still be the Queen, because I was the tallest, the fairest, the wisest! I know it!

BIÖRN.

That is true.

ELINA.

Once you took me by the hand and looked earnestly at me, and said: "Be not proud of your fairness, or your wisdom; but be proud as the mountain eagle as often as you think: I am Inger Gyldenlöve's daughter!"

CHARACTERS

LADY INGER OTTISDAUGHTER RÖMER, *widow of High Steward Nils Gyldenlöve.*
ELINA GYLDENLÖVE, *her daughter.*
NILS LYKKE, *Danish knight and councillor.*
OLAF SKAKTAVL, *an outlawed Norwegian noble.*
NILS STENSSON.
JENS BIELKE, *Swedish commander.*
BIÖRN, *majordomo at Östråt.*
FINN, *a servant.*
EINAR HUK, *bailiff at Östråt.*
Servants, peasants, and Swedish men-at-arms.

The action takes place at Östråt Manor, on the Trondhiem Fiord, in the year 1528.

[PRONUNCIATION OF NAMES.—Östråt = *Östrot;* Elina (Norwegian, Eline) = *Eleena;* Stensson = *Staynson;* Biörn = *Byörn;* Jens Bielke = *Yens Byelke;* Huk = *Hook.* The *g*'s in "Inger" and in "Gyldenlöve" are, of course, hard. The final *e*'s and the *ö*'s pronounced much as in German.]

BIÖRN.

Mistress Elina,—what ails you?

ELINA.

[*Sits down again.*] Me? Nothing. Go on.

BIÖRN.

Well, as I was saying—did this knight but look straight in a woman's eyes, never could she forget it after; her thoughts must follow him wherever he went, and she must waste away with sorrow.

ELINA.

I have heard that tale.—Moreover, 'tis no tale you are telling, for the knight you speak of is Nils Lykke, who sits even now in the Council of Denmark——

BIÖRN.

Maybe so.

ELINA.

Well, let it pass—go on!

BIÖRN.

Now it happened once on a time——

ELINA.

[*Rises suddenly.*] Hush; be still!

BIÖRN.

What now? What is the matter?

ELINA.

[*Listening.*] Do you hear?

BIÖRN.

What?

ELINA.

It is there! Yes, by the cross of Christ, it is there!

BIÖRN.

[*Rises.*] W h a t is there? Where?

ELINA.

She herself—in the hall——

[*Goes hastily towards the hall.*

BIÖRN.

[*Following.*] How can you think—? Mistress Elina, —go to your chamber!

ELINA.

Hush; stand still! Do not move; do not let her see you! Wait—the moon is coming out. Can you not see the black-robed figure——?

BIÖRN.

By all the saints——!

ELINA.

Do you see—she turns Knut Alfson's picture to the wall. Ha-ha; be sure it looks her too straight in the eyes!

BIÖRN.

Mistress Elina, hear me!

ELINA.

[*Going back towards the fireplace.*] Now I know what I know!

BIÖRN.

[*To himself.*] Then it is true!

ELINA.

Who was it, Biörn? Who was it?

BIÖRN.

You saw as plainly as I.

ELINA.

Well? Whom did I see?

BIÖRN.

You saw your mother.

ELINA.

[*Half to herself.*] Night after night I have heard her steps in there. I have heard her whispering and moaning like a soul in pain. And what says the song—? Ah, now I know! Now I know that——

BIÖRN.

Hush!

[LADY INGER GYLDENLÖVE *enters rapidly from the hall, without noticing the others; she goes to the window, draws the curtain, and gazes out as if watching for some one on the high road; after a while, she turns and goes slowly back into the hall.*

ELINA.

[*Softly, following her with her eyes.*] White, white as the dead——!

[*An uproar of many voices is heard outside the door on the right.*

BIÖRN.

What can this be?

ELINA.

Go out and see what is amiss.

[EINAR HUK, *the bailiff, appears in the anteroom, with a crowd of* RETAINERS *and* PEASANTS.

EINAR HUK.

[*In the doorway.*] Straight in to her! And be not abashed!

BIÖRN.

What seek you?

EINAR HUK.

Lady Inger herself.

BIÖRN.

Lady Inger? So late?

EINAR HUK.

Late, but time enough, I wot.

THE PEASANTS.

Yes, yes; she must hear us now!

[*The whole rabble crowds into the room. At the same moment* LADY INGER *appears in the doorway of the hall. A sudden silence.*

LADY INGER.

What would you with me?

EINAR HUK.

We sought you, noble lady, to——

LADY INGER.

Well—say on!

EINAR HUK.

Why, we are not ashamed of our errand. In one word —we come to pray you for weapons and leave——

LADY INGER.

Weapons and leave—? And for what?

EINAR HUK.

There has come a rumour from Sweden that the people of the Dales have risen against King Gustav——

LADY INGER.

The people of the Dales?

EINAR HUK.

Ay, so the tidings run, and they seem sure enough.

LADY INGER.

Well—if it were so—what have you to do with the Dale-folk's rising?

THE PEASANTS.

We will join them! We will help! We will free ourselves!

LADY INGER.

[*To herself.*] Can the time be come?

EINAR HUK.

From all our borderlands the peasants are pouring across to the Dales. Even outlaws that have wandered for years in the mountains are venturing down to the homesteads again, and drawing men together, and whetting their rusty swords.

LADY INGER.

[*After a pause.*] Tell me, men—have you thought well of this? Have you counted the cost, if King Gustav's men should win?

BIÖRN.

[*Softly and imploringly to* LADY INGER.] Count the cost to the Danes if King Gustav's men should lose.

LADY INGER.

[*Evasively.*] That reckoning is not for me to make.
[*Turns to the people.*
You know that King Gustav is sure of help from Denmark. King Frederick is his friend, and will never leave him in the lurch——

EINAR HUK.

But if the people were now to rise all over Norway's land?—if we all rose as one man, nobles and peasants together?—Ay, Lady Inger Gyldenlöve, the time we have waited for is surely come. We have but to rise now to drive the strangers from the land.

THE PEASANTS.

Ay, out with the Danish sheriffs! Out with the foreign masters! Out with the Councillors' lackeys!

LADY INGER.

[*To herself.*] Ah, there is metal in them; and yet, yet——!

BIÖRN.

[*To himself.*] She is of two minds. [*To* ELINA.] What say you now, Mistress Elina—have you not sinned in misjudging your mother?

ELINA.

Biörn—if my eyes have lied to me, I could tear them out of my head!

EINAR HUK.

See you not, my noble lady, King Gustav must be dealt with first. Were h i s power once gone, the Danes cannot long hold this land——

LADY INGER.

And then?

EINAR HUK.

Then we shall be free. We shall have no more foreign masters, and can choose ourselves a king, as the Swedes have done before us.

LADY INGER.

[*With animation.*] A king for ourselves! Are you thinking of the Sture[1] stock?

[1] Pronounce *Stoorĕ*.

EINAR HUK.

King Christiern and others after him have swept bare our ancient houses. The best of our nobles are outlaws on the mountain paths, if so be they still live. Nevertheless, it might still be possible to find one or other shoot of the old stems——

LADY INGER

[*Hastily.*] Enough, Einar Huk, enough! [*To herself.*] Ah, my dearest hope!

[*Turns to the* PEASANTS *and* RETAINERS.

I have warned you, now, as well as I can. I have told you how great is the risk you run. But if you are fixed in your purpose, 'twere folly in me to forbid what I have no power to prevent.

EINAR HUK.

Then we have your leave to——?

LADY INGER.

You have your own firm will; take counsel with t h a t. If it be as you say, that you are daily harassed and oppressed—— I know but little of these matters. I will not know more! What can I, a lonely woman—? Even if you were to plunder the Banquet Hall—and there's many a good weapon on the walls—you are the masters at Östråt to-night. You must do as seems good to you. Good-night!

[*Loud cries of joy from the multitude. Candles are lighted; the* RETAINERS *bring out weapons of different kinds from the hall.*

BIÖRN.

[*Seizes* LADY INGER'S *hand as she is going.*] Thanks, my noble and high-souled mistress! I, that have known you from childhood up—I have never doubted you.

LADY INGER.

Hush, Biörn—'tis a dangerous game I have ventured this night. The others stake only their lives; but I, trust me, a thousandfold more!

BIÖRN.

How mean you? Do you fear for your power and your favour with——?

LADY INGER.

My power? O God in Heaven!

A RETAINER.

[*Comes from the hall with a large sword.*] See, here's a real good wolf's-tooth! With this will I flay the blood-suckers' lackeys!

EINAR HUK.

[*To another.*] What is that you have found?

THE RETAINER.

The breastplate they call Herlof Hyttefad's.

EINAR HUK.

'Tis too good for such as you. Look, here is the shaft of Sten Sture's[1] lance; hang the breastplate upon it, and we shall have the noblest standard heart can desire.

[1] Pronounce *Stayn Stoorĕ*.

FINN.

[*Comes from the door on the left, with a letter in his hand, and goes towards* LADY INGER.] I have sought you through all the house——

LADY INGER.

What would you?

FINN.

[*Hands her the letter.*] A messenger is come from Trondhiem[1] with a letter for you.

LADY INGER.

Let me see! [*Opening the letter.*] From Trondhiem? What can it be? [*Runs through the letter.*] O God! From him! And here in Norway——

[*Reads on with strong emotion, while the men go on bringing out arms from the hall.*

LADY INGER.

[*To herself.*] He is coming here. He is coming here to-night!—Ay, then 'tis with our wits we must fight, not with the sword.

EINAR HUK.

Enough, enough, good fellows; we are well armed now. Set we forth now on our way!

LADY INGER.

[*With a sudden change of tone.*] No man shall leave my house to-night!

[1] Pronounce *Tronyem*.

EINAR HUK.

But the wind is fair, noble lady; 'twill take us quickly up the fiord, and——

LADY INGER.

It shall be as I have said.

EINAR HUK.

Are we to wait till to-morrow, then?

LADY INGER.

Till to-morrow, and longer still. No armed man shall go forth from Östråt yet awhile.

[*Signs of displeasure among the crowd.*

SOME OF THE PEASANTS.

We will go all the same, Lady Inger!

THE CRY SPREADS.

Ay, ay; we will go!

LADY INGER.

[*Advancing a step towards them.*] Who dares to move?

[*A silence. After a moment's pause, she adds:*

I have thought for you. What do you common folk know of the country's needs? How dare you judge of such things? You must e'en bear your oppressions and burdens yet awhile. Why murmur at that, when you see that we, your leaders, are as ill bested as you?— — Take all the weapons back to the hall. You shall know my further will hereafter. Go!

[*The* RETAINERS *take back the arms, and the whole crowd then withdraws by the door on the right.*

ELINA.

[*Softly to* BIÖRN.] Say you still that I have sinned in misjudging—the Lady of Östråt?

LADY INGER.

[*Beckons to* BIÖRN, *and says.*] Have a guest-chamber ready.

BIÖRN.

It is well, Lady Inger!

LADY INGER.

And let the gate be open to whoever shall knock.

BIÖRN.

But——?

LADY INGER.

The gate open!

BIÖRN.

The gate open. [*Goes out to the right.*

LADY INGER.

[*To* ELINA, *who has already reached the door on the left.*] Stay here!— — Elina—my child—I have something to say to you alone.

ELINA.

I hear you.

LADY INGER.

Elina— —you think evil of your mother.

ELINA.

I think, to my sorrow, what your deeds have forced me to think.

LADY INGER.

And you answer as your bitter spirit bids you.

ELINA.

Who has filled my spirit with bitterness? From my childhood I had been wont to look up to you as a great and high-souled woman. 'Twas in your likeness that I pictured the women of the chronicles and the Book of Heroes. I thought the Lord God himself had set his seal on your brow, and marked you out as the leader of the helpless and the oppressed. Knights and nobles sang your praise in the feast-hall; and even the peasants, far and near, called you the country's pillar and its hope. All thought that through you the good times were to come again! All thought that through you a new day was to dawn over the land! The night is still here; and I scarce know if through you I dare look for any morning.

LADY INGER.

'Tis easy to see whence you have learnt such venomous words. You have let yourself give ear to what the thoughtless rabble mutters and murmurs about things it can little judge of.

ELINA.

"Truth is in the people's mouth," was your word when they praised you in speech and song.

LADY INGER.

Maybe so. But if indeed I chose to sit here idle, though it was my part to act—think you not that such a choice were burden enough for me, without your adding to its weight?

ELINA.

The weight I add to your burden crushes me no less than you. Lightly and freely I drew the breath of life, so long as I had you to believe in. For my pride is my life; and well might I have been proud, had you remained what once you were.

LADY INGER.

And what proves to you that I have not? Elina—how know you so surely that you are not doing your mother wrong?

ELINA.

[*Vehemently.*] Oh, that I were!

LADY INGER.

Peace! You have no right to call your mother to account.—With a single word I could— —; but 'twould be an ill word for you to hear; you must await what time shall bring; maybe that——

ELINA.

[*Turns to go.*] Sleep well, my mother!

LADY INGER.

[*Hesitates.*] Nay—stay with me; I have still somewhat— — Come nearer;—you must hear me, Elina!

[*Sits down by the table in front of the window.*

ELINA.

I hear you.

LADY INGER.

For as silent as you are, I know well that you often long to be gone from here. Östråt is too lonely and lifeless for you.

ELINA.

Do you wonder at that, my mother?

LADY INGER.

It rests with you whether all this shall henceforth be changed.

ELINA.

How so?

LADY INGER.

Listen.—I look for a guest to-night.

ELINA.

[*Comes nearer.*] A guest?

LADY INGER.

A guest, who must remain a stranger to all. None must know whence he comes or whither he goes.

ELINA.

[*Throws herself, with a cry of joy, at her mother's feet, and seizes her hands.*] My mother! My mother! Forgive me, if you can, all the wrong I have done you!

LADY INGER.

What do you mean? Elina, I do not understand you.

ELINA.

Then they were all deceived! You are still true at heart!

LADY INGER.

Rise, rise and tell me——

ELINA.

Think you I do not know who the stranger is?

LADY INGER.

You know? And yet——?

ELINA.

Think you the gates of Östråt shut so close that never a whisper of the country's woe can slip through them? Think you I do not know that the heir of many a noble line wanders outlawed, without rest or shelter, while Danish masters lord it in the home of his fathers?

LADY INGER.

And what then?

ELINA.

I know well that many a high-born knight is hunted through the woods like a hungry wolf. No hearth has he to rest by, no bread to eat——

LADY INGER.

[*Coldly.*] Enough! Now I understand you.

ELINA.

[*Continuing.*] And that is why the gates of Östråt must stand open by night! That is why he must remain a stranger to all, this guest of whom none must know whence he comes or whither he goes! You are setting at naught the harsh decree that forbids you to harbour or succour the outlaw——

LADY INGER.

Enough, I say!

[*After a short silence, adds with an effort:*

You mistake, Elina—'tis no outlaw I look for.

ELINA.

[*Rises.*] Then I have understood you ill indeed.

LADY INGER.

Listen to me, my child; but think as you listen; if indeed you can tame that wild spirit of yours.

ELINA.

I am tame, till you have spoken.

LADY INGER.

Attend, then, to what I have to tell you.—I have sought, so far as lay in my power, to keep you in ignorance of all our griefs and miseries. What could it avail

to fill your young heart with wrath and care? 'Tis not women's weeping and wailing that can deliver us; we need the courage and strength of men.

ELINA.

Who has told you that, when courage and strength are needed, I shall be found wanting?

LADY INGER.

Hush, child;—I might take you at your word.

ELINA.

How mean you, my mother?

LADY INGER.

I might call on you for both; I might——; but let me say my say out first.

Know then that the time seems now to be drawing nigh, towards which the Danish Council have been working for many a year—the time, I mean, for them to strike the last blow at our rights and our freedom. Therefore must we now——

ELINA.

[*Eagerly.*] Openly rebel, my mother?

LADY INGER.

No; we must gain breathing-time. The Council is now assembled at Copenhagen, considering how best to go to work. Most of them hold, 'tis said, that there can be no end to dissensions till Norway and Denmark are one; for should we still possess our rights as a free land

when the time comes to choose the next king, 'tis most like that the feud will break out openly. Now the Danish councillors would hinder this——

ELINA.

Ay, they would hinder it—! But are we to endure such things? Are we to look on quietly while——?

LADY INGER.

No, we will not endure it. But to take up arms—to declare open war—what would come of that, so long as we are not united? And were we ever less united in this land than we are even now?—No, if aught is to be accomplished, it must be secretly and in silence. Even as I said, we must have time to draw breath. In the South, a good part of the nobles are for the Dane; but here in the North they are still in doubt. Therefore has King Frederick sent hither one of his most trusted councillors, to assure himself with his own eyes how we stand affected.

ELINA.

[*In suspense.*] Well—and then——?

LADY INGER.

He is the guest I look for to-night.

ELINA.

He comes hither? And to-night?

LADY INGER.

A trading ship brought him to Trondhiem yesterday. News has just reached me of his approach; he may be here within the hour.

ELINA.

And you do not bethink you, my mother, how 'twill endanger your fame thus to receive the Danish envoy? Do not the people already look on you with distrustful eyes? How can you hope that, when the time comes, they will let you rule and guide them, if it be known that——

LADY INGER.

Fear not. All this I have fully weighed; but there is no danger. His errand in Norway is a secret; he has come unknown to Trondhiem, and unknown shall he be our guest at Östråt.

ELINA.

And the name of this Danish lord——?

LADY INGER.

It sounds well, Elina; Denmark has scarce a nobler name.

ELINA.

But what then do you purpose? I cannot yet grasp your meaning.

LADY INGER.

You will soon understand.—Since we cannot trample on the serpent, we must bind it.

ELINA.

Take heed that it burst not your bonds.

LADY INGER.

It rests with you to tighten them as you will.

ELINA.

With me?

LADY INGER.

I have long seen that Östråt is as a cage to you. The young falcon chafes behind the iron bars.

ELINA.

My wings are clipped. Even if you set me free—'twould avail me little.

LADY INGER.

Your wings are not clipped, save by your own will.

ELINA.

Will? My will is in your hands. Be what you once were, and I too——

LADY INGER.

Enough, enough. Hear me further.—It would scarce break your heart to leave Östråt?

ELINA.

Maybe not, my mother!

LADY INGER.

You told me once, that you lived your happiest life in your tales and histories. What if that life were to be yours once more?

ELINA.

What mean you?

LADY INGER.

Elina—if a mighty noble were to come and lead you to his castle, where you should find damsels and squires, silken robes and lofty halls awaiting you?

ELINA.

A noble, you say?

LADY INGER.

A noble.

ELINA.

[*More softly.*] And the Danish envoy comes hither to-night?

LADY INGER.

To-night.

ELINA.

If so be, then I fear to read the meaning of your words.

LADY INGER.

There is naught to fear if you misread them not. It is far from my thought to put force upon you. You shall choose for yourself in this matter, and follow your own rede.

ELINA.

[*Comes a step nearer.*] Know you the tale of the mother who drove across the hills by night, with her little children in the sledge? The wolves were on her track; 'twas life or death with her;—and one by one she cast out her little ones, to win time and save herself.

LADY INGER.

Nursery tales! A mother would tear the heart from her breast before she would cast her child to the wolves!

ELINA.

Were I not my mother's daughter, I would say you were right. But you are like that mother; one by one have you cast out your daughters to the wolves. The eldest went first. Five years ago Merete[1] went forth from Östråt; now she dwells in Bergen, and is Vinzents Lunge's[2] wife. But think you she is happy as the Danish noble's lady? Vinzents Lunge is mighty, well-nigh as a king; Merete has damsels and squires, silken robes and lofty halls; but the day has no sunshine for her, and the night no rest; for she has never loved him. He came hither and he wooed her, for she was the greatest heiress in Norway, and 'twas then needful for him to gain a footing in the land. I know it; I know it well! Merete bowed to your will; she went with the stranger lord.—But what has it cost her? More tears than a mother should wish to answer for at the day of reckoning!

LADY INGER.

I know my reckoning, and I fear it not.

ELINA.

Your reckoning ends not here. Where is Lucia, your second child?

LADY INGER.

Ask God, who took her.

[1] Pronounce *Mayraytë*. [2] Pronounce *Loonghë*.

ELINA.

'Tis you I ask; 'tis you must answer for her young life. She was glad as a bird in spring when she sailed from Östråt to be Merete's guest. A year passed, and she stood in this room once more; but her cheeks were white, and death had gnawed deep into her breast. Ah, I startle you, my mother! You thought the ugly secret was buried with her;—but she told me all. A courtly knight had won her heart. He would have wedded her. You knew that her honour was at stake; yet your will never bent—and your child had to die. You see, I know all!

LADY INGER.

All? Then she told you his name?

ELINA.

His name? No; his name she did not tell me. She shrank from his name as though it stung her;—she never uttered it.

LADY INGER.

[*Relieved, to herself.*] Ah, then you do not know all——
Elina—'tis true that the whole of this matter was well known to me. But there is one thing it seems you have overlooked. The lord whom Lucia met in Bergen was a Dane——

ELINA.

That, too, I know.

LADY INGER.

And his love was a lie. With guile and soft speeches he had ensnared her.

ELINA.

I know it; but nevertheless she loved him; and had you had a mother's heart, your daughter's honour had been more to you than all.

LADY INGER.

Not more than her happiness. Think you that, with Merete's lot before my eyes, I could sacrifice my second child to a man that loved her not?

ELINA.

Cunning words may beguile many, but they beguile not me——

Think not I know nothing of all that is passing in our land? I understand your counsels but too well. I know that in you the Danish lords have no true friend. It may be that you hate them; but you fear them too. When you gave Merete to Vinzents Lunge, the Danes held the mastery on all sides throughout our land. Three years later, when you forbade Lucia to wed the man to whom, though he had deceived her, she had given her life—things were far different then. The King's Danish governors had shamefully misused the common people, and you deemed it not wise to link yourself still more closely to the foreign tyrants.

And what have you done to avenge her that was sent so young to her grave? You have done nothing. Well then, I will act in your stead; I will avenge all the shame they have brought upon our people and our house!

LADY INGER.

You? What will you do?

ELINA.

I will go my way, even as you go yours. What I shall do I myself know not; but I feel within me the strength to dare all for our righteous cause.

LADY INGER.

Then have you a hard fight before you. I once promised as you do now—and my hair has grown grey under the burden of that promise.

ELINA.

Good-night! Your guest will soon be here, and at that meeting I should be one too many.

It may be there is yet time for you——; well, God strengthen and guide you on your path! Forget not that the eyes of many thousands are fixed on you. Think on Merete, weeping late and early over her wasted life. Think on Lucia, sleeping in her black coffin.

And one thing more. Forget not that in the game you play this night, your stake is your last child.

[*Goes out to the left.*

LADY INGER.

[*Looks after her awhile.*] My last child? You know not how true was that word—— But the stake is not my child only. God help me, I am playing to-night for the whole of Norway's land.

Ah—is not that some one riding through the gateway?

[*Listens at the window.*

No; not yet. Only the wind; it blows cold as the grave——

Has God a right to do this?—To make me a woman —and then to lay on my shoulders a man's work?

For I h a v e the welfare of the country in my hands. It i s in my power to make them rise as one man. They look to m e for the signal; and if I give it not now—it may never be given.

To delay? To sacrifice the many for the sake of one? Were it not better if I could——? No, no, no—I w i l l not! I c a n n o t!

[*Steals a glance towards the Banquet Hall, but turns away again as if in dread, and whispers:*

I can see them in there now. Pale spectres—dead ancestors—fallen kinsfolk.—Ah, those eyes that pierce me from every corner!

[*Makes a gesture of repulsion, and cries:*

Sten Sture! Knut Alfson! Olaf Skaktavl! Back—back!—I c a n n o t do this!

[*A* STRANGER, *strongly built, and with grizzled hair and beard, has entered from the Banquet Hall. He is dressed in a torn lambskin tunic; his weapons are rusty.*

THE STRANGER.

[*Stops in the doorway, and says in a low voice.*] Hail to you, Inger Gyldenlöve!

LADY INGER.

[*Turns with a scream.*] Ah, Christ in heaven save me!

[*Falls back into a chair.* THE STRANGER *stands gazing at her, motionless, leaning on his sword.*

ACT SECOND

The room at Östråt, as in the first Act.

LADY INGER GYLDENLÖVE *is seated at the table on the right, by the window.* OLAF SKAKTAVL *is standing a little way from her. Their faces show that they have been engaged in a heated discussion.*

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

For the last time, Inger Gyldenlöve—you are not to be moved from your purpose?

LADY INGER.

I can do nought else. And my counsel to you is: do as I do. If it be Heaven's will that Norway perish utterly, perish it must, for all we may do to save it.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

And think you I can content my heart with that belief? Shall I sit and look idly on, now that the hour is come? Do you forget the reckoning I have against them? They have robbed me of my lands, and parcelled them out among themselves. My son, my only child, the last of my race, they have slaughtered like a dog. Myself they have outlawed and hunted through forest and fell these twenty years.—Once and again have folk whispered of my death; but this I believe,

that they shall not lay me beneath the sod before I have seen my vengeance.

LADY INGER.

Then is there a long life before you. What have you in mind to do?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Do? How should I know what I will do? It has never been my part to plot and plan. That is where you must help me. You have the wit for that. I have but my sword and my two arms.

LADY INGER.

Your sword is rusted, Olaf Skaktavl! All the swords in Norway are rusted.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

That is doubtless why some folk fight only with their tongues.—Inger Gyldenlöve—great is the change in you. Time was when the heart of a man beat in your breast.

LADY INGER.

Put me not in mind of what w a s .

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

'Tis for that very purpose I am here. You s h a l l hear me, even if——

LADY INGER.

Be it so then; but be brief; for—I must say it—this is no place of safety for you.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Östråt is no place of safety for an outlaw? That I have long known. But you forget that an outlaw is unsafe wheresoever he may wander.

LADY INGER.

Speak then; I will not hinder you.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

'Tis nigh on thirty years now since first I saw you. It was at Akershus[1] in the house of Knut Alfson and his wife. You were little more than a child then; yet were you bold as the soaring falcon, and wild and headstrong too at times. Many were the wooers around you. I too held you dear—dear as no woman before or since. But you cared for nothing, thought of nothing, save your country's evil case and its great need.

LADY INGER.

I counted but fifteen summers then—remember that! And was it not as though a frenzy had seized us all in those days?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Call it what you will; but one thing I know—even the old and sober men among us thought it written in the counsels of the Lord on high that you were she who should break our thraldom and win us all our rights again. And more: you yourself then thought as we did.

[1] Pronounce *Ahkers-hoos*.

LADY INGER.

'Twas a sinful thought, Olaf Skaktavl. 'Twas my proud heart, and not the Lord's call, that spoke in me.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

You could have been the chosen one had you but willed it. You came of the noblest blood in Norway; power and riches were soon to be yours; and you had an ear for the cries of anguish—then!

Do you remember that afternoon when Henrik Krummedike and the Danish fleet anchored off Akershus? The captains of the fleet offered terms of peace, and, trusting to the safe-conduct, Knut Alfson rowed on board. Three hours later, we bore him through the castle gate——

LADY INGER.

A corpse; a corpse!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

The best heart in Norway burst, when Krummedike's hirelings struck him down. Methinks I still can see the long procession that passed into the Banquet Hall, heavily, two by two. There he lay on his bier, white as a spring cloud, with the axe-cleft in his brow. I may safely say that the boldest men in Norway were gathered there that night. Lady Margrete stood by her dead husband's head, and we swore as one man to venture lands and life to avenge this last misdeed and all that had gone before.—Inger Gyldenlöve,—who was it that burst through the circle of men? A maiden—almost a

child—with fire in her eyes and her voice half choked with tears.—What was it she swore? Shall I repeat your words?

LADY INGER.

I swore what the rest of you swore; neither more nor less.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

You remember your oath—and yet you have forgotten it.

LADY INGER.

And how did the others keep their promise? I speak not of you, Olaf Skaktavl, but of your friends, all Norway's nobles? Not one of them, in all these years, has had the courage to be a man; yet they lay it to my charge that I am a woman.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

I know what you would say. Why have they bent to the yoke, and not defied the tyrants to the last? 'Tis but too true; there is base metal enough in our noble houses nowadays. But had they held together—who knows what then might have been? And you could have held them together, for before you all had bowed.

LADY INGER.

My answer were easy enough, but 'twould scarce content you. So let us leave speaking of what cannot be changed. Tell me rather what has brought you to Östråt. Do you need harbour? Well, I will try to hide you. If you would have aught else, speak out; you shall find me ready——

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

For twenty years have I been homeless. In the mountains of Jæmteland my hair has grown grey. My dwelling has been with wolves and bears.—You see, Lady Inger—*I* need you not; but both nobles and people stand in sore need of you.

LADY INGER.

The old burden.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Ay, it sounds but ill in your ears, I know; yet hear it you must, for all that. In brief, then: I come from Sweden: troubles are brewing: the Dales are ready to rise.

LADY INGER.

I know it.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Peter Kanzler[1] is with us—secretly, you understand.

LADY INGER.

[*Starting.*] Peter Kanzler?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

'Tis he that has sent me to Östråt.

LADY INGER.

[*Rises.*] Peter Kanzler, say you?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

He himself;—but mayhap you no longer know him?

[1] That is, Peter the Chancellor.

LADY INGER.

[*Half to herself.*] Only too well!—But tell me, I pray you,—what message do you bring?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

When the rumour of the rising reached the border mountains, where I then was, I set off at once into Sweden. 'Twas not hard to guess that Peter Kanzler had a finger in the game. I sought him out and offered to stand by him;—he knew me of old, as you know, and knew that he could trust me; so he has sent me hither.

LADY INGER.

[*Impatiently.*] Yes, yes,—he sent you hither to——?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*With secrecy.*] Lady Inger—a stranger comes to Östråt to-night.

LADY INGER.

[*Surprised.*] What? Know you that——?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Assuredly I know it. I know all. 'Twas to meet him that Peter Kanzler sent me hither.

LADY INGER.

To meet him? Impossible, Olaf Skaktavl,—impossible.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

'Tis as I tell you. If he be not already come, he will soon——

LADY INGER.

Doubtless, doubtless; but——

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Then you knew of his coming?

LADY INGER.

Ay, surely. He sent me a message. 'Twas therefore they opened to you as soon as you knocked.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*Listens.*] Hush!—some one is riding along the road. [*Goes to the window.*] They are opening the gate.

LADY INGER.

[*Looks out.*] It is a knight and his attendant. They are dismounting in the courtyard.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

'Tis he, then. His name?

LADY INGER.

You know not his name?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Peter Kanzler refused to tell it me. He would say no more than that I should find him at Östråt the third evening after Martinmas——

LADY INGER.

Ay; even to-night.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

He was to bring letters with him; and from them, and from you, I was to learn who he is.

LADY INGER.

Then let me lead you to your chamber. You have need of rest and refreshment. You shall soon have speech with the stranger.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Well, be it as you will. [*Both go out to the left.*

[*After a short pause,* FINN *enters cautiously by the door on the right, looks round the room, and peeps into the Banquet Hall; he then goes back to the door, and makes a sign to some one outside. Immediately after, enter* COUNCILLOR NILS LYKKE *and the Swedish Commander,* JENS BIELKE.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Softly.*] No one?

FINN.

[*In the same tone.*] No one, master!

NILS LYKKE.

And we may depend on you in all things?

FINN.

The commandant in Trondhiem has ever given me a name for trustiness.

NILS LYKKE.

'Tis well; he has said as much to me. First of all, then—has there come any stranger to Östråt to-night, before us?

FINN.

Ay; a stranger came an hour since.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Softly, to* JENS BIELKE.] He is here. [*Turns again to* FINN.] Would you know him again? Have you seen him?

FINN.

Nay, none has seen him, that I know, but the gatekeeper. He was brought at once to Lady Inger, and she——

NILS LYKKE.

Well? What of her? He is not gone again already?

FINN.

No; but it seems she holds him hidden in one of her own rooms; for——

NILS LYKKE.

It is well.

JENS BIELKE.

[*Whispers.*] Then the first thing is to put a guard on the gate; so are we sure of him.

NILS LYKKE.

[*With a smile.*] H'm! [*To* FINN.] Tell me—is there any way of leaving the castle, save by the gate? Gape not at me so! I mean—can one escape from Östråt unseen, though the castle gate be barred?

FINN.

Nay, that I know not. 'Tis true they talk of secret ways in the vaults beneath; but no one knows them save Lady Inger—and mayhap Mistress Elina.

JENS BIELKE.

The devil!

NILS LYKKE.

It is well. You may go.

FINN.

Should you need me in aught again, you have but to open the second door on the right in the Banquet Hall, and I shall presently be at hand.

NILS LYKKE.

Good. [*Points to the entrance-door.* FINN *goes out.*

JENS BIELKE.

Now, by my soul, dear friend and brother—this campaign is like to end but scurvily for both of us.

NILS LYKKE.

[*With a smile.*] Oh—not for me, I hope.

JENS BIELKE.

Say you so? First of all, there is little honour to be won in hunting an overgrown whelp like this Nils Sture. Are we to think him mad or in his sober senses after the pranks he has played? First he breeds bad blood among the peasants; promises them help and all their hearts can desire;—and then, when it comes to the pinch, off he runs to hide behind a petticoat!

Moreover, to say truth, I repent that I followed your counsel and went not my own way.

NILS LYKKE.

[*To himself.*] Your repentance comes somewhat late, my brother!

JENS BIELKE.

For, let me tell you, I have never loved digging at a badger's earth. I looked for quite other sport. Here have I ridden all the way from Jæmteland with my horsemen, and have got me a warrant from the Trondhiem commandant to search for the rebel wheresoever I please. All his tracks point towards Östråt——

NILS LYKKE.

He is here! He is here, I tell you!

JENS BIELKE.

Were it not liker, in that case, that we had found the gate barred and well guarded? Would that we had; then could I have found use for my men-at-arms——

NILS LYKKE.

But instead, the gate is very courteously thrown open to us. Mark now—if Inger Gyldenlöve's fame belie her not, I warrant she will not let her guests lack for either meat or drink.

JENS BIELKE.

Ay, to turn aside from our errand! And what wild whim was that of yours to have me leave my horsemen half a league from the castle! Had we come in force——

NILS LYKKE.

She had made us none the less welcome for t h a t. But mark well that then our coming had made a stir. The peasants round about had held it for an outrage against Lady Inger; she had risen high in their favour once more—and with that, look you, we were ill served.

JENS BIELKE.

Maybe so. But what am I to do now? Count Sture is in Östrat, you say. Ay, but how does that profit me? Be sure Lady Inger Gyldenlöve has as many hiding-places as the fox, and more than one outlet to them. You and I, alone, may go snuffing about here as long as we please. I would the devil had the whole affair!

NILS LYKKE.

Well, then, my friend—if you like not the turn your errand has taken, you have but to leave the field to me.

JENS BIELKE.

To you? What will you do?

NILS LYKKE.

Caution and cunning may in this matter prove of more avail than force of arms.—And to say truth, Captain Jens Bielke—something of the sort has been in my mind ever since we met in Trondhiem yesterday.

JENS BIELKE.

Was that why you persuaded me to leave the men-at-arms?

NILS LYKKE.

Both your purpose at Östråt and mine could best be served without them; and so——

JENS BIELKE.

The foul fiend seize you—I had almost said! And me to boot! Might I not have known that there is guile in all your dealings?

NILS LYKKE.

Be sure I shall need all my guile here, if I am to face my foe with even weapons. And let me tell you, 'tis of the utmost moment to me that I acquit me of my mission secretly and well. You must know that when I set forth I was scarce in favour with my lord the King. He held me in suspicion; though I dare swear I have served him as well as any man could, in more than one ticklish charge.

JENS BIELKE.

That you may safely boast. God and all men know you for the craftiest devil in all the three kingdoms.

NILS LYKKE.

I thank you! Though, after all, 'tis not much to say. But this present errand I count as indeed a crowning test of my powers; for here I have to outwit a woman——

JENS BIELKE.

Ha-ha-ha! In t h a t art you have long since given crowning proofs of your skill, dear brother. Think you we in Sweden know not the song—

Fair maidens a-many they sigh and they pine:
"Ah God, that Nils Lykke were mine, mine, mine!"

NILS LYKKE.

Alas, 'tis women of twenty and thereabouts that ditty speaks of. Lady Inger Gyldenlöve is nigh on fifty, and wily to boot beyond all women. 'Twill be no light matter to overmatch her. But it m u s t be done—at any cost. Should I contrive to win certain advantages over her that the King has long desired, I can reckon on the embassy to France next spring. You know that I spent three years at the University in Paris? My whole soul is set on coming thither again, most of all if I can appear in lofty place, a king's ambassador.—Well, then—is it agreed—do you leave Lady Inger to me? Remember—when you were last at Court in Copenhagen, I made way for you with more than one fair lady——

JENS BIELKE.

Nay, truly now—that generosity cost you little; one and all of them were at your beck and call. But let that

pass; now that I have begun amiss in this matter, I had as lief that you should take it on your shoulders. Yet o n e thing you must promise—if the young Count Sture be in Östråt, you will deliver him into my hands, dead or alive!

NILS LYKKE.

You shall have him all alive. I, at any rate, mean not to kill him. But now you must ride back and join your people. Keep guard on the road. Should I mark aught that mislikes me, you shall know it forthwith.

JENS BIELKE.

Good, good. But how am I to get out——?

NILS LYKKE.

The fellow that brought us in will show the way. But go quietly——

JENS BIELKE.

Of course, of course. Well—good fortune to you!

NILS LYKKE.

Fortune has never failed me in a war with women. Haste you now! [JENS BIELKE *goes out to the right.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*Stands still for awhile; then walks about the room, looking round him; then he says softly:*] At last, then, I am at Östråt—the ancient hall whereof a child, two years ago, told me so much.

Lucia. Ay, two years ago she was still a child. And now—now she is dead. [*Hums with a half-smile.*] "Blossoms plucked are blossoms withered— —"

[*Looks round him again.*

Östråt. 'Tis as though I had seen it all before; as though I were at home here.—In there is the Banquet Hall. And underneath is—the grave-vault. It must be there that Lucia lies.

[*In a lower voice, half-seriously, half with forced gaiety.*

Were I timorous, I might well find myself fancying that when I set foot within Östråt gate she turned about in her coffin; as I crossed the courtyard she lifted the lid; and when I named her name but now, 'twas as though a voice summoned her forth from the grave-vault.—Maybe she is even now groping her way up the stairs. The face-cloth blinds her, but she gropes on and on in spite of it.

Now she has reached the Banquet Hall! She stands watching me from behind the door!

[*Turns his head backwards over one shoulder, nods, and says aloud:*

Come nearer, Lucia! Talk to me a little! Your mother keeps me waiting. 'Tis tedious waiting—and you have helped me to while away many a tedious hour—— ——

[*Passes his hand over his forehead, and takes one or two turns up and down.*

Ah, there!—Right, right; there is the deep curtained window. 'Tis there that Inger Gyldenlöve is wont to stand gazing out over the road, as though looking for one that never comes. In there—[*looks towards the door on the left*]—somewhere in there is Sister Elina's chamber. Elina? Ay, Elina is her name.

Can it be that she is so rare a being—so wise and so brave as Lucia fancied her? Fair, too, they say. But for a wedded wife—? I should not have written so plainly.— —

[*Lost in thought, he is on the point of sitting down by the table, but stands up again.*

How will Lady Inger receive me?—She will scarce burn the castle over our heads, or slip me through a trap-door. A stab from behind—? No, not that way either—— [*Listens towards the hall.*

Aha!

[LADY INGER GYLDENLÖVE *enters from the hall.*

LADY INGER.

[*Coldly.*] My greeting to you, Sir Councillor——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Bows deeply.*] Ah—the Lady of Östråt!

LADY INGER.

——and my thanks that you have forewarned me of your visit.

NILS LYKKE.

I could do no less. I had reason to think that my coming might surprise you——

LADY INGER.

Truly, Sir Councillor, therein you judged aright. Nils Lykke was indeed the last guest I looked to see at Östråt.

NILS LYKKE.

And still less, mayhap, did you think to see him come as a friend?

LADY INGER.

As a friend? You add mockery to all the shame and sorrow you have heaped upon my house? After bringing my child to the grave, you still dare——

NILS LYKKE.

With your leave, Lady Inger Gyldenlöve—on that matter we should scarce agree; for you count as nothing what *I* lost by that same unhappy chance. I purposed nought but in honour. I was tired of my unbridled life; my thirtieth year was already past; I longed to mate me with a good and gentle wife. Add to all this the hope of becoming y o u r son-in-law——

LADY INGER.

Beware, Sir Councillor! I have done all in my power to hide my child's unhappy fate. But because it is out of sight, think not it is out of mind. There may yet come a time——

NILS LYKKE.

You threaten me, Lady Inger? I have offered you my hand in amity; you refuse to take it. Henceforth, then, it is to be open war between us?

LADY INGER.

I knew not there had ever been aught else?

NILS LYKKE.

Not on y o u r side, mayhap. *I* have never been your enemy,—though, as a subject of the King of Denmark, I lacked not good cause.

LADY INGER.

I understand you. I have not been pliant enough. It has not proved so easy as some of you hoped to lure me over into your camp.—Yet methinks you have nought to complain of. My daughter Merete's husband is your countryman—further I cannot go. My position is no easy one, Nils Lykke!

NILS LYKKE.

That I can well believe. Both nobles and people here in Norway think they have an ancient claim on you—a claim, 'tis said, you have but half fulfilled.

LADY INGER.

Your pardon, Sir Councillor,—I account for my doings to none but God and myself. If it please you, then, let me understand what brings you hither.

NILS LYKKE.

Gladly, Lady Inger! The purpose of my mission to this country can scarce be unknown to you——?

LADY INGER.

I know the mission that report assigns you. Our King would fain know how the Norwegian nobles stand affected towards him.

NILS LYKKE.

Assuredly.

LADY INGER.

Then that is why you visit Östråt?

NILS LYKKE.

In part. But it is far from my purpose to demand any profession of loyalty from you——

LADY INGER.

What then?

NILS LYKKE.

Hearken to me, Lady Inger! You said yourself but now that your position is no easy one. You stand half way between two hostile camps, whereof neither dares trust you fully. Your own interest must needs bind you to u s. On the other hand, you are bound to the disaffected by the bond of nationality, and—who knows? —mayhap by some secret tie as well.

LADY INGER.

[*To herself.*] A secret tie! Oh God, can he——?

NILS LYKKE.

[*Notices her emotion, but makes no sign, and continues without change of manner.*] You cannot but see that such a position must ere long become impossible.—Suppose, now, it lay in my power to free you from these embarrassments which——

LADY INGER.

In your power, you say?

NILS LYKKE.

First of all, Lady Inger, I would beg you to lay no stress on any careless words I may have used concerning that which lies between us two. Think not that I have forgotten for a moment the wrong I have done you. Suppose, now, I had long purposed to make atonement, as far as might be, where I had sinned. Suppose it were for that reason I had contrived to have this mission assigned me.

LADY INGER.

Speak your meaning more clearly, Sir Councillor;—I cannot follow you.

NILS LYKKE.

I can scarce be mistaken in thinking that you, as well as I, know of the threatened troubles in Sweden. You know, or at least you can guess, that this rising is of far wider aim than is commonly supposed, and you understand therefore that our King cannot look on quietly and let things take their course. Am I not right?

LADY INGER.

Go on.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Searchingly, after a short pause.*] There is one possible chance that might endanger Gustav Vasa's throne——

LADY INGER.

[*To herself.*] Whither is he tending?

NILS LYKKE.

——the chance, namely, that there should exist in Sweden a man entitled by his birth to claim election to the kingship.

LADY INGER.

[*Evasively.*] The Swedish nobles have been even as bloodily hewn down as our own, Sir Councillor. Where would you seek for——?

NILS LYKKE.

[*With a smile.*] Seek? The man is found already——

LADY INGER.

[*Starts violently.*] Ah! He is found?

NILS LYKKE.

——and he is too closely akin to you, Lady Inger, to be far from your thoughts at this moment.

[*Looks fixedly at her.*

The last Count Sture left a son——

LADY INGER.

[*With a cry.*] Holy Saviour, how know you——?

NILS LYKKE.

[*Surprised.*] Be calm, Madam, and let me finish. —This young man has till now lived quietly with his mother, Sten Sture's widow.

LADY INGER.

[*Breathes more freely.*] With—? Ah, yes—true, true!

NILS LYKKE.

But now he has come forward openly. He has shown himself in the Dales as leader of the peasants; their numbers are growing day by day; and—as mayhap you know—they are finding friends among the peasants on this side of the border-hills.

LADY INGER.

[*Who has in the meantime regained her composure.*] Sir Councillor,—you speak of all these matters as though they must of necessity be known to me. What ground have I given you to believe so? I know, and wish to know, nothing. All my care is to live quietly within my own domain; I give no countenance to disturbers of the peace; but neither must you reckon on me if it be your purpose to suppress them.

NILS LYKKE.

[*In a low voice.*] Would you still be inactive, were it my purpose to come to their aid?

LADY INGER.

How am I to understand you?

NILS LYKKE.

Have you not seen, then, whither I have been aiming all this time?—Well, I will tell you all, frankly and openly. Know, then, that the King and his Council

see clearly that we can have no sure footing in Norway so long as the nobles and the people continue, as now, to think themselves wronged and oppressed. We understand to the full that willing allies are better than sullen subjects; and we have therefore no heartier wish than to loosen the bonds that hamper u s, in effect, even as straitly as you. But you will scarce deny that the temper of Norway towards us makes such a step too dangerous—so long as we have no sure support behind us.

LADY INGER.

And this support——?

NILS LYKKE.

Should naturally come from Sweden. But, mark well, not so long as Gustav Vasa holds the helm; h i s reckoning with Denmark is not yet settled, and mayhap never will be. But a new king of Sweden, who had the people with him, and who owed his throne to the help of Denmark— —. Well, you begin to understand me? T h e n we could safely say to you Norwegians: "Take back your old ancestral rights; choose you a ruler after your own mind; be our friends in need, as we will be yours!"—Mark you well, Lady Inger, herein is our generosity less than it may seem; for you must see that, far from weakening, 'twill rather strengthen us.

And now that I have opened my heart to you so fully, do you too cast away all mistrust. And therefore [*confidently*]—the knight from Sweden, who came hither an hour before me——

LADY INGER.

Then you already know of his coming?

NILS LYKKE.

Most certainly. 'Tis he whom I seek.

LADY INGER.

[*To herself.*] Strange! Then it must be as Olaf Skaktavl said. [*To* NILS LYKKE.] I pray you wait here, Sir Councillor! I will go bring him to you.

[*Goes out through the Banquet Hall.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*Looks after her awhile in exultant astonishment.*] She is bringing him! Ay, truly—she is bringing him! The battle is half won. I little thought it would go so smoothly.

She is deep in the counsels of the rebels; she started in terror when I named Sten Sture's son.

And now? H'm! Since Lady Inger has been simple enough to walk into the snare, Nils Sture will not make many difficulties. A hot-blooded boy, thoughtless and rash——. With my promise of help he will set forth at once—unhappily Jens Bielke will snap him up by the way—and the whole rising will be nipped in the bud.

And then? Then one further point to our advantage. It is spread abroad that the young Count Sture has been at Östrât,—that a Danish envoy has had audience of Lady Inger—that thereupon the young Count Nils has been snapped up by King Gustav's men-at-arms a mile from the castle.—— Let Inger Gyldenlöve's name among the people stand never so high—'twill scarce recover from such a blow.

[*Starts up in sudden uneasiness.*

By all the devils—! What if she has scented mischief? It may be he is even now slipping through our fingers— [*Listens towards the hall, and says with relief.*] Ah, there is no fear. Here they come.

[LADY INGER GYLDENLÖVE *enters from the hall, accompanied by* OLAF SKAKTAVL.

LADY INGER.

[*To* NILS LYKKE.] Here is the man you seek.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside.*] Powers of hell—what means this?

LADY INGER.

I have told this knight your name and all that you have imparted to me——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Irresolutely.*] Ay? Have you so? Well——

LADY INGER.

——and I will not hide from you that his faith in your help is none of the strongest.

NILS LYKKE.

Is it not?

LADY INGER.

Can you marvel at that? Surely you know both his way of thinking and his bitter fate——

NILS LYKKE.

This man's—? Ah—yes, truly——

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*To* NILS LYKKE.] But seeing 'tis Peter Kanzler himself that has appointed us this meeting——

NILS LYKKE.

Peter Kanzler—? [*Recovers himself quickly.*] Ay, right,—I have a mission from Peter Kanzler——

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

He must know best whom he can trust. So why should I trouble my head with pondering how——

NILS LYKKE.

Ay, you are right, noble Sir; why waste time over that?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Rather let us come straight to the matter.

NILS LYKKE.

Straight to the point; no beating about the bush—'tis ever my fashion.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Then will you tell me your errand here?

NILS LYKKE.

Methinks you can partly guess my errand——

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Peter Kanzler said something of papers that——

NILS LYKKE.

Papers? Ay, true, the papers!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Doubtless you have them with you?

NILS LYKKE.

Of course; safely bestowed; so safely that I cannot at once——

[*Appears to search the inner pockets of his doublet; says to himself:*

Who the devil is he? What pretext can I make? I may be on the brink of great discoveries——

[*Notices that the* SERVANTS *are laying the table and lighting the lamps in the Banquet Hall, and says to* OLAF SKAKTAVL:

Ah, I see Lady Inger has taken order for the evening meal. Mayhap we could better talk of our affairs at table.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Good; as you will.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside.*] Time gained—all gained!

[*To* LADY INGER *with a show of great friendliness:*

And meanwhile we might learn what part Lady Inger Gyldenlöve purposes to take in our design?

LADY INGER.

I?—None.

NILS LYKKE AND OLAF SKAKTAVL.

None!

LADY INGER.

Can ye marvel, noble Sirs, that I venture not on a game wherein loss would mean loss of all? And that, too, when none of my allies dare trust me fully.

NILS LYKKE.

That reproach touches not me. I trust you blindly; I pray you be assured of that.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Who should believe in you, if not your countrymen?

LADY INGER.

Truly,—this confidence rejoices me.

[*Goes to a cupboard in the back wall and fills two goblets with wine.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside.*] Curse her, will she slip out of the noose?

LADY INGER.

[*Hands a goblet to each.*] And since so it is, I offer you a cup of welcome to Östråt. Drink, noble knights! Pledge me to the last drop!

[*Looks from one to the other after they have drunk, and says gravely:*

But now I must tell you—one goblet held a welcome for my friend; the other—death for my enemy!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Throws down the goblet.*] Ah, I am poisoned!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*At the same time, clutches his sword.*] Death and hell, have you murdered me?

LADY INGER.

[*To* OLAF SKAKTAVL, *pointing to* NILS LYKKE.] You see the Danes' confidence in Inger Gyldenlöve——

[*To* NILS LYKKE, *pointing to* OLAF SKAKTAVL.] ——and likewise my countrymen's faith in me!

[*To both of them.*

Yet you would have me place myself in your power? Gently, noble Sirs—gently! The Lady of Östråt is not yet in her dotage.

[ELINA GYLDENLÖVE *enters by the door on the left.*

ELINA.

I heard loud voices—. What is amiss?

LADY INGER.

[*To* NILS LYKKE.] My daughter Elina.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Softly.*] Elina! I had not pictured her thus.

[ELINA *catches sight of* NILS LYKKE, *and stands still, as in surprise, gazing at him.*

LADY INGER.

[*Touches her arm.*] My child—this knight is——

ELINA.

[*Motions her mother back with her hand, still looking intently at him, and says:*] There is no need! I see who he is. He is Nils Lykke.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside, to* LADY INGER.] How? Does she know me? Can Lucia have—? Can she know——?

LADY INGER.

Hush! She knows nothing.

ELINA.

[*To herself.*] I knew it;—even so must Nils Lykke appear.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Approaches her.*] Yes, Elina Gyldenlöve,—you have guessed aright. And as it seems that, in some sense, you know me,—and, moreover, as I am your mother's guest,—you will not deny me the flower-spray you wear in your bosom. So long as it is fresh and fragrant, I shall have in it an image of yourself.

ELINA.

[*Proudly, but still gazing at him.*] Pardon me, Sir Knight—'twas plucked in my own chamber, and t h e r e can grow no flower for you.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Loosening a spray of flowers that he wears in the front of his doublet.*] At least you will not disdain this humble gift. 'Twas a farewell token from a courtly dame when I set forth from Trondhiem this morning.—But mark me, noble maiden,—were I to offer you a gift that were fully worthy of you, it could be nought less than a princely crown.

ELINA.

[*Who has taken the flowers passively.*] And were it the royal crown of Denmark you held forth to me—before I shared it with y o u, I would crush it to pieces between my hands, and cast the fragments at your feet!

[*Throws down the flowers at his feet, and goes into the Banquet Hall.*

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*Mutters to himself.*] Bold—as Inger Ottisdaughter by Knut Alfson's bier!

LADY INGER.

[*Softly, after looking alternately at* ELINA *and* NILS LYKKE.] The wolf c a n be tamed. Now to forge the fetters.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Picks up the flowers and gazes in rapture after* ELINA.] God's holy blood, but she is proud and fair!

ACT THIRD

The Banquet Hall. A high bow-window in the background; a smaller window in front on the left. Several doors on each side. The ceiling is supported by massive wooden pillars, on which, as well as on the walls, are hung all sorts of weapons. Pictures of saints, knights, and ladies hang in long rows. Pendent from the ceiling a large many-branched lamp, alight. In front, on the right, an ancient carven high-seat. In the middle of the hall, a table with the remnants of the evening meal.

ELINA GYLDENLÖVE *enters from the left, slowly and in deep thought. Her expression shows that she is going over again in her mind the scene with* NILS LYKKE. *At last she repeats the motion with which she flung away the flowers, and says in a low voice:*

ELINA.

——And then he gathered up the fragments of the crown of Denmark—no, 'twas the flowers—and: "God's holy blood, but she is proud and fair!"

Had he whispered the words in the most secret spot, long leagues from Östråt,—still had I heard them!

How I hate him! How I have always hated him,—this Nils Lykke!—There lives not another man like him, 'tis said. He plays with women—and treads them under his feet.

And 'twas to h i m my mother thought to offer me! —How I hate him!

They say Nils Lykke is unlike all other men. It is not true! There is nothing strange in him. There are many, many like him! When Biörn used to tell me his tales, all the princes looked as Nils Lykke looks. When I sat lonely here in the hall and dreamed my histories, and my knights came and went,—they were one and all even as he.

How strange and how good it is to hate! Never have I known how sweet it can be—till to-night. Ah—not to live a thousand years would I sell the moments I have lived since I saw him!—

"God's holy blood, but she is proud— —"

[*Goes slowly towards the back, opens the window and looks out.* NILS LYKKE *comes in by the first door on the right.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*To himself.*] "Sleep well at Östråt, Sir Knight," said Inger Gyldenlöve as she left me. Sleep well? Ay, 'tis easily said, but— — Out there, sky and sea in tumult; below, in the grave-vault, a young girl on her bier; the fate of two kingdoms in my hand;—and in my breast a withered flower that a woman has flung at my feet. Truly, I fear me sleep will be slow of coming. [*Notices* ELINA, *who has left the window, and is going out on the left.*] There she is. Her haughty eyes seem veiled with thought.—Ah, if I but dared—. [*Aloud.*] Mistress Elina!

ELINA.

[*Stops at the door.*] What will you? Why do you pursue me?

NILS LYKKE.

You err; I pursue you not. I am myself pursued.

ELINA.

You?

NILS LYKKE.

By a multitude of thoughts. Therefore 'tis with sleep as with you:—it flees me.

ELINA.

Go to the window, and there you will find pastime; —a storm-tossed sea——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Smiles.*] A storm-tossed sea? That may I find in you as well.

ELINA.

In me?

NILS LYKKE.

Ay, of that our first meeting has assured me.

ELINA.

And that offends you?

NILS LYKKE.

Nay, in nowise; yet I could wish to see you of milder mood.

ELINA.

[*Proudly.*] Think you that you will ever have your wish?

NILS LYKKE.

I am sure of it. I have a welcome word to say to you.

ELINA.

What is it?

NILS LYKKE.

Farewell.

ELINA.

[*Comes a step nearer him.*] Farewell? You are leaving Östråt—so soon?

NILS LYKKE.

This very night.

ELINA.

[*Seems to hesitate for a moment; then says coldly.*] Then take my greeting, Sir Knight! [*Bows and is about to go.*

NILS LYKKE.

Elina Gyldenlöve,—I have no right to keep you here; but 'twill be unlike your nobleness if you refuse to hear what I have to say to you.

ELINA.

I hear you, Sir Knight.

NILS LYKKE.

I know you hate me.

ELINA.

You are keen-sighted, I perceive.

NILS LYKKE.

But I know, too, that I have fully merited your hate. Unseemly and wounding were the words I wrote of you in my letter to Lady Inger.

ELINA.

Like enough; I have not read them.

NILS LYKKE.

But at least their purport is not unknown to you; I know your mother has not left you in ignorance of the matter; at the least she has told you how I praised the lot of the man who—: surely you know the hope I nursed—

ELINA.

Sir Knight—if 'tis of that you would speak—

NILS LYKKE.

I speak of it, only to ask pardon for my words; for no other reason, I swear to you. If my fame—as I have too much cause to fear—has gone before me to Östråt, you must needs know enough of my life not to wonder that in such things I should go to work something boldly. I have met many women, Elina Gyldenlöve; but not one have I found unyielding. Such lessons, look you, teach a man to be secure. He loses the habit of roundabout ways——

ELINA.

Maybe so. I know not of what metal those women can have been made.

For the rest, you err in thinking 'twas your letter to my mother that aroused my soul's hatred and bitterness against you. It is of older date.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Uneasily.*] Of older date? What mean you?

ELINA.

'Tis as you guessed:—your fame has gone before you, to Östråt, even as over all the land. Nils Lykke's name is never spoken save with the name of some woman whom he has beguiled and cast off. Some speak it in wrath, others with laughter and wanton jeering at those weak-souled creatures. But through the wrath and the laughter and the jeers rings the song they have made of you, full of insolent challenge, like an enemy's song of triumph.

'Tis all this together that has begotten my hate for you. You were ever in my thoughts, and ever I longed to meet you face to face, that you might learn that there are women on whom your subtle speeches are lost—if you should think to use them.

NILS LYKKE.

You judge me unjustly, if you judge from what rumour has told of me. Even if there be truth in all you have heard,—you know not the causes behind it.—As a boy of seventeen I began my course of pleasure. I have lived full fifteen years since then. Light women granted me all that I would—even before the wish had shaped itself into a prayer; and what I offered them they seized with eager hands. You are the first woman that has flung back a gift of mine with scorn at my feet.

Think not I reproach you. Rather I honour you for it, as never before have I honoured woman. But for this I reproach my fate—and the thought is a gnawing pain to me—that you and I were not sooner brought face to face.—— Elina Gyldenlöve! Your mother has told me of you. While far from Östråt life ran its restless course, you went your lonely way in silence, living in your dreams and histories. Therefore you will understand what I have to tell you.—Know, then, that once I too lived even such a life as yours. Methought that when I stepped forth into the great world, a noble and stately woman would come to meet me, and would beckon to me and point out the path towards a glorious goal.—I was deceived, Elina Gyldenlöve! Women came to meet me; but s h e was not among them. Ere yet I had come to full manhood, I had learnt to despise them all.

Was it my fault? Why were not the others even as you?—I know the fate of your fatherland lies heavy on your soul; and you know the part I have in these affairs——. 'Tis said of me that I am false as the sea-foam. Mayhap I am; but if I be, it is women who have made me so. Had I sooner found what I sought,—had I met a woman proud and noble and high-souled even as you, then had my path been different indeed. At this moment, maybe, I had been standing at your side as the champion of all that suffer wrong in Norway's land. For t h i s I believe: a woman is the mightiest power in the world, and in her hand it lies to guide a man whither God Almighty would have him go.

ELINA.

[*To herself.*] Can it be as he says? Nay, nay; there is falsehood in his eyes and deceit on his lips. And yet —no song is sweeter than his words.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Coming closer, speaks low and more intimately.*] As you have dwelt here at Östråt, alone with your changeful thoughts, how often have you felt your bosom stifling; how often have the roof and walls seemed to shrink together till they crushed your very soul. Then have your longings taken wing with you; then have you yearned to fly far from here, you knew not whither.—How often have you not wandered alone by the fiord; far out a ship has sailed by in fair array, with knights and ladies on her deck, with song and music of stringed instruments;—a faint, far-off rumour of great events has reached your ears;—and you have felt a longing in your breast, an unconquerable craving to know all that lies beyond the sea. But you have not understood what ailed you. At times you have thought it was the fate of your fatherland that filled you with all these restless broodings. You deceived yourself;—a maiden so young as you has other food for musing.— — Elina Gyldenlöve! Have you never had visions of an unknown power—a strong mysterious might, that binds together the destinies of mortals? When you dreamed of the many-coloured life far out in the wide world—when you dreamed of knightly jousts and joyous festivals—saw you never in your dreams a knight, who stood in the midst of the gayest rout, with a smile on his lips and with bitterness in his heart,—a knight that had once dreamed a dream as fair as yours, of a woman noble and stately, for whom he went ever a-seeking, and ever in vain?

ELINA.

Who are you, that have power to clothe my most secret thoughts in words? How can you tell me what I

have borne in my inmost soul—yet knew it not myself? How know you——?

NILS LYKKE.

All that I have told you, I have read in your eyes.

ELINA.

Never has any man spoken to me as you have spoken. I have understood you but dimly; and yet—all, all seems changed since——

[*To herself.*] Now I understand why they said that Nils Lykke was unlike all others.

NILS LYKKE.

There is one thing in the world that might drive a man to madness, but to think of it; and that is the thought of what might have been, had things but fallen out in this way or that. Had I met you on my path while the tree of my life was yet green and budding, at this hour, mayhap, you had been— —

But forgive me, noble lady! Our speech of these past few moments has made me forget how we stand one to another. 'Twas as though a secret voice had told me from the first that to you I could speak openly, without flattery or dissimulation.

ELINA.

That can you.

NILS LYKKE.

'Tis well;—and it may be that this openness has already in part reconciled us. Ay—my hope is yet bolder. The time may yet come when you will think of the

stranger knight without hate or bitterness in your soul. Nay,—mistake me not! I mean not n o w—but some time, in the days to come. And that this may be the less hard for you—and as I have begun once for all to speak to you plainly and openly—let me tell you——

ELINA.

Sir Knight——!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Smiling.*] Ah, I see the thought of my letter still affrights you. Fear nought on that score. I would from my heart it were unwritten, for—I know 'twill concern you little enough, so I may even say it right out—for I love you not, and shall never come to love you. Fear nothing, therefore, as I said before; I shall in nowise seek to— —

But what ails you——?

ELINA.

Me? Nothing, nothing.—Tell me but one thing: why do you still wear those flowers? What would you with them?

NILS LYKKE.

These? Are they not a gage of battle you have thrown down to the wicked Nils Lykke, on behalf of all womankind? What could I do but take it up?

You asked what I would with them? [*Softly.*] When I stand again amid the fair ladies of Denmark—when the music of the strings is hushed and there is silence in the hall—then will I bring forth these flowers and

tell a tale of a young maiden sitting alone in a gloomy black-beamed hall, far to the north in Norway——

[*Breaks off and bows respectfully.*

But I fear I detain the noble daughter of the house too long. We shall meet no more; for before daybreak I shall be gone. So now I bid you farewell.

ELINA.

Fare you well, Sir Knight! [*A short silence.*

NILS LYKKE.

Again you are deep in thought, Elina Gyldenlöve! Is it the fate of your fatherland that weighs upon you still?

ELINA.

[*Shakes her head, absently gazing straight in front of her.*] My fatherland?—I think not of my fatherland.

NILS LYKKE.

Then 'tis the strife and misery of the time that disquiets you.

ELINA.

The time? I had forgotten it—— —— You go to Denmark? Said you not so?

NILS LYKKE.

I go to Denmark.

ELINA.

Can I look towards Denmark from this hall?

NILS LYKKE.

[*Points to the window on the left.*] Ay, from this window. Denmark lies there, to the south.

ELINA.

And is it far from here? More than a hundred leagues?

NILS LYKKE.

Much more. The sea lies between you and Denmark.

ELINA.

[*To herself.*] The sea? Thought has sea-gulls' wings. The sea cannot stay it. [*Goes out to the left.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*Looks after her awhile; then says:*] If I could but spare two days now—or even one—I would have her in my power, even as the others.

And yet is there rare stuff in this maiden. She is proud. Might I not after all——? No; rather humble her—— [*Paces the room.*] Verily, I believe she has set my blood afire. Who would have thought it possible after all these years?—Enough of this! I must get out of the tangle I have here thrust myself into. [*Sits in a chair on the right.*] What is the meaning of it? Both Olaf Skaktavl and Inger Gyldenlöve seem blind to the mistrust 'twill waken, when 'tis rumoured that I am in their league.—Or can Lady Inger have seen through my purpose? Can she have seen that all my promises were but designed to lure Nils Sture forth from his hiding-place? [*Springs up.*] Damnation! Is it I that have

been fooled? 'Tis like enough that Count Sture is not at Östråt at all. It may be the rumour of his flight was but a feint. He may be safe and sound among his friends in Sweden, while I—— [*Walks restlessly up and down.*] And to think I was so sure of success! If I should effect nothing? If Lady Inger should penetrate all my designs—and publish my discomfiture—. To be a laughing-stock both here and in Denmark! To have sought to lure Lady Inger into a trap—and given her cause the help it most needed—strengthened her in the people's favour——! Ah, I could well-nigh sell myself to the Evil One, would he but help me to lay hands on Count Sture.

[*The window in the background is pushed open.* NILS STENSSON *appears outside.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*Clutches at his sword.*] Who is there?

NILS STENSSON.

[*Jumps down on to the floor.*] Ah; here I am at last then!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside.*] What means this?

NILS STENSSON.

God's peace, master!

NILS LYKKE.

Thanks, good Sir! Methinks you have chosen a strange way of entran

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, what the devil was I to do? The gate was shut. Folk must sleep in this house like bears at Yuletide.

NILS LYKKE.

God be thanked! Know you not that a good conscience is the best pillow?

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, it must be even so; for with all my rattling and thundering, I——

NILS LYKKE.

——You won not in?

NILS STENSSON.

You have hit it. So I said to myself: As you are bidden to be in Östråt to-night, if you have to go through fire and water, you may surely make free to creep through a window.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside.*] Ah, if it should be——! [*Moves a step or two nearer.*] Was it, then, of the last necessity that you should reach Östråt to-night?

NILS STENSSON.

Was it? Ay, faith but it was. I love not to keep folk waiting, I can tell you.

NILS LYKKE.

Aha,—then Lady Inger Gyldenlöve looks for your coming?

NILS STENSSON.

Lady Inger Gyldenlöve? Nay, that I can scarce say for certain; [*with a sly smile*] but there might be some one else——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Smiles in answer.*] Ah, so there might be some one else—?

NILS STENSSON.

Tell me—are you of the house?

NILS LYKKE.

I? Well, in so far that I am Lady Inger's guest this evening.

NILS STENSSON.

A guest?—Is not to-night the third night after Martinmas?

NILS LYKKE.

The third night after—? Ay, right enough.—Would you seek the lady of the house at once? I think she is not yet gone to rest. But might not y o u sit down and rest awhile, dear young Sir? See, here is yet a flagon of wine remaining, and doubtless you will find some food. Come, fall to; you will do wisely to refresh your strength.

NILS STENSSON.

You are right, Sir; 'twere not amiss. [*Sits down by the table and eats and drinks.*] Both roast meat and sweet cakes! Why, you live like lords here! When one

has slept, as I have, on the naked ground, and lived on bread and water for four or five days——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Looks at him with a smile.*] Ay, such a life must be hard for one that is wont to sit at the high-table in noble halls——

NILS STENSSON.

Noble halls——?

NILS LYKKE.

But now can you take your ease at Östråt, as long as it likes you.

NILS STENSSON.

[*Pleased.*] Ay? Can I truly? Then I am not to be-gone again so soon?

NILS LYKKE.

Nay, that I know not. Sure you yourself can best say that.

NILS STENSSON.

[*Softly.*] Oh, the devil! [*Stretches himself in the chair.*] Well, you see—'tis not yet certain. I, for my part, were nothing loath to stay quiet here awhile; but——

NILS LYKKE.

——But you are not in all points your own master? There be other duties and other affairs——?

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, that is just the rub. Were I to choose, I would rest me at Östråt at least the winter through; I have for the most part led a soldier's life, and—— [*Interrupts himself suddenly, fills a goblet, and drinks.*] Your health, Sir!

NILS LYKKE.

A soldier's life? H'm!

NILS STENSSON.

Nay, what I would have said is this: I have long been eager to see Lady Inger Gyldenlöve, whose fame has spread so wide. She must be a queenly woman,—is't not so?—The one thing I like not in her, is that she is so cursedly slow to take open action.

NILS LYKKE.

Open action?

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, ay, you understand me; I mean she is so loath to take a hand in driving the foreign masters out of the land.

NILS LYKKE.

Ay, there you are right. But if now you do what you can, you will doubtless move her.

NILS STENSSON.

I? God knows 'twould but little serve if *I*——

NILS LYKKE.

Yet 'tis strange you should seek her here if you have so little hope.

NILS STENSSON.

What mean you?—Tell me, know you Lady Inger?

NILS LYKKE.

Surely; since I am her guest——

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, but it in nowise follows that you know her. I too am her guest, yet have I never seen so much as her shadow.

NILS LYKKE.

Yet did you speak of her——

NILS STENSSON.

——as all folk speak. Why should I not? And besides, I have often enough heard from Peter Kanzler——

[*Stops in confusion, and falls to eating busily.*

NILS LYKKE.

You would have said——?

NILS STENSSON.

[*Eating.*] I? Nay, 'tis all one.

[NILS LYKKE *laughs.*

NILS STENSSON.

Why laugh you, Sir?

NILS LYKKE.

At nothing, Sir!

NILS STENSSON.

[*Drinks.*] A pretty vintage ye have in this house.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Approaches him confidentially.*] Listen—were it not time now to throw off the mask?

NILS STENSSON.

[*Smiling.*] The mask? Why, do as seems best to you.

NILS LYKKE.

Then off with all disguise. You are known, Count Sture!

NILS STENSSON.

[*Bursts out laughing.*] Count Sture? Do you too take me for Count Sture? [*Rises from the table.*] You mistake, Sir! I am not Count Sture.

NILS LYKKE.

You are not? Then who are you?

NILS STENSSON.

My name is Nils Stensson.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Looks at him with a smile.*] H'm! Nils Stensson? But you are not Sten Sture's son Nils? The name chimes at least.

NILS STENSSON.

True enough; but God knows what right I have to bear it. My father I never knew; my mother was a poor peasant woman, that was robbed and murdered in one of the old feuds. Peter Kanzler chanced to be on the spot; he took me into his care, brought me up, and taught me the trade of arms. As you know, King Gustav has been hunting him this many a year; and I have followed him faithfully, wherever he went.

NILS LYKKE.

Peter Kanzler has taught you more than the trade of arms, meseems.— — Well, well; then you are not Nils Sture. But at least you come from Sweden. Peter Kanzler has sent you hither to find a stranger, who——

NILS STENSSON.

[*Nods cunningly.*] ——who is found already.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Somewhat uncertain.*] And whom you do not know?

NILS STENSSON.

As little as you know me; for I swear to you by God himself: I am not Count Sture!

NILS LYKKE.

In sober earnest, Sir?

NILS STENSSON.

As truly as I live! Wherefore should I deny it, if I were?

NILS LYKKE.

But where, then, is Count Sture?

NILS STENSSON.

[*In a low voice.*] Ay, t h a t is just the secret.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Whispers.*] Which is known to you? Is't not so?

NILS STENSSON.

[*Nods.*] And which I am to tell you.

NILS LYKKE.

To tell me? Well then,—where is he?

[NILS STENSSON *points upwards.*

NILS LYKKE.

Up there? Lady Inger holds him hidden in the loft-room?

NILS STENSSON.

Nay, nay; you mistake me. [*Looks round cautiously.*] Nils Sture is in Heaven!

NILS LYKKE.

Dead? And where?

NILS STENSSON.

In his mother's castle,—three weeks since.

NILS LYKKE.

Ah, you are deceiving me! 'Tis but five or six days since he crossed the frontier into Norway.

NILS STENSSON.

Oh, that was I.

NILS LYKKE.

But just before that the Count had appeared in the Dales. The people, who were restless already, broke out openly and would have chosen him for king.

NILS STENSSON.

Ha-ha-ha; that was me too!

NILS LYKKE.

You?

NILS STENSSON.

I will tell you how it came about. One day Peter Kanzler called me to him and gave me to know that great things were preparing. He bade me set out for Norway and fare to Östråt, where I must be on a certain fixed day——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Nods.*] The third night after Martinmas.

NILS STENSSON.

There I was to meet a stranger——

NILS LYKKE.

Ay, right; I am he.

NILS STENSSON.

From him I should learn what more I had to do. Moreover, I was to let him know that the Count was dead of a sudden, but that as yet 'twas known to no one save to his mother the Countess, together with Peter Kanzler and a few old servants of the Stures.

NILS LYKKE.

I understand. The Count was the peasants' rallying-point. Were the tidings of his death to spread, they would fall asunder,—and 'twould all come to nought.

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, maybe so; I know little of such matters.

NILS LYKKE.

But how came you to give yourself out for the Count?

NILS STENSSON.

How came I to——? Nay, what know I? Many's the mad prank I have hit on in my day. And yet 'twas not I hit on it neither; for whereever I appeared in the Dales, the people crowded round me and hailed me as Count Sture. Deny it as I pleased, 'twas wasted breath. The Count had been there two years before, they said—and the veriest child knew me again. Well, so be it, thought I; never again will you be a Count in this life; why not try what 'tis like for once?

NILS LYKKE.

Well,—and what did you more?

NILS STENSSON.

I? I ate and drank and took my ease. The only pity was that I had to take the road again so soon. But when I set forth across the frontier—ha-ha-ha—I promised them I would soon be back with three or four thousand men—I know not how many I said—and then we would lay on in earnest.

NILS LYKKE.

And you did not bethink you that you were acting rashly?

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, afterwards; but then, to be sure, 'twas too late.

NILS LYKKE.

I grieve for you, my young friend; but you will soon come to feel the effects of your folly. Let me tell you that you are pursued. A troop of Swedish men-at-arms is out after you.

NILS STENSSON.

After me? Ha-ha-ha! Nay, that is rare! And when they come and think they have Count Sture in their clutches—ha-ha-ha!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Gravely.*] ——Then 'tis all over with you.

NILS STENSSON.

All over——? But I am not Count Sture.

NILS LYKKE.

You have called the people to arms. You have given seditious promises, and raised troubles in the land.

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, but 'twas only in jest!

NILS LYKKE.

King Gustav will scarce take that view of the affair.

NILS STENSSON.

Truly, there is something in what you say. To think I could be so featherwitted— — Well, well, I'm not a dead man yet! You will protect me; and besides—the men-at-arms can scarce be at my heels yet.

NILS LYKKE.

But what else have you to tell me?

NILS STENSSON.

I? Nothing. When once I have given you the packet——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Off his guard.*] The packet?

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, sure you know——

NILS LYKKE.

Ah, right, right; the papers from Peter Kanzler——

NILS STENSSON.

See, here they all are.

[*Takes out a packet from inside his doublet, and hands it to* NILS LYKKE.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside.*] Letters and papers for Olaf Skaktavl.

[*To* NILS STENSSON.

The packet is open, I see. 'Tis like you know what it contains?

NILS STENSSON.

No, good sir; I love not to read writing; and for reason good.

NILS LYKKE.

I understand; you have given most care to the trade of arms. [*Sits down by the table on the right, and runs through the papers.*] Aha! Here is light enough and to spare on what is brewing.

This small letter tied with a silken thread—[*Examines the address.*] This too for Olaf Skaktavl. [*Opens the letter, and glances through its contents.*] From Peter Kanzler. I thought as much. [*Reads under his breath.*] "I am hard bested, for—"; ay, sure enough; here it stands, —"Young Count Sture has been gathered to his fathers, even at the time fixed for the revolt to break forth" —"—but all may yet be made good—" What now? [*Reads on in astonishment.*] "You must know, then, Olaf Skaktavl, that the young man who brings you this letter is a son of—" Heaven and earth—can it be so? —Ay, by the cross of Christ, even so 'tis written! [*Glances at* NILS STENSSON.] Can he be—? Ah, if it were so! [*Reads on.*] "I have nurtured him since he was a year

old; but up to this day I have ever refused to give him back, trusting to have in him a sure hostage for Inger Gyldenlöve's faithfulness to us and to our friends. Yet in that respect he has but little availed us. You may marvel that I told you not this secret when you were with me here of late; therefore will I confess freely that I feared you might seize upon him, even as I had done, and to the same intent. But now, when you have seen Lady Inger, and have doubtless assured yourself how loath she is to have a hand in our undertaking, you will see that 'tis wisest to give her back her own as soon as may be. Well might it come to pass that in her joy and security and thankfulness—" —— "—that is now our last hope." [*Sits for awhile as though struck dumb with surprise; then exclaims in a low voice:*] Aha,—what a letter! Gold would not buy it!

NILS STENSSON.

'Tis plain I have brought you weighty tidings. Ay, ay,—Peter Kanzler has many irons in the fire, folk say.

NILS LYKKE.

[*To himself.*] What to do with all this? A thousand paths are open to me— What if I were—? No, 'twere to risk too much. But if—ah, if I—? I will venture it! [*Tears the letter across, crumples up the pieces, and hides them inside his doublet; puts back the other papers into the packet, which he thrusts inside his belt; rises and says:*] A word, my young friend!

NILS STENSSON.

[*Approaching him.*] Well—your looks say that the game goes bravely.

NILS LYKKE.

Ay, by my soul it does. You have given me a hand of nought but court cards,—queens and knaves——

NILS STENSSON.

But what of me, that have brought all these good tidings? Have I nought more to do?

NILS LYKKE.

You? Ay, that have you. You belong to the game. You are a king—and king of trumps too.

NILS STENSSON.

I a king? Oh, now I understand; you are thinking of my exaltation——

NILS LYKKE.

Your exaltation?

NILS STENSSON.

Ay; that which you foretold for me, if King Gustav's men got me in their clutches——

[*Makes a motion to indicate hanging.*

NILS LYKKE.

True enough;—but let that trouble you no more. It now lies with yourself alone whether within a month you shall have the hempen noose or a chain of gold about your neck.

NILS STENSSON.

A chain of gold? And it lies with me?

[NILS LYKKE *nods.*

NILS STENSSON.

Why, then, the devil take doubting! Do you but tell me what I am to do.

NILS LYKKE.

I will. But first you must swear me a solemn oath that no living creature in the wide world shall know what I confide to you.

NILS STENSSON.

Is that all? You shall have ten oaths, if you will.

NILS LYKKE.

Not so lightly, young Sir! 'Tis no jesting matter.

NILS STENSSON.

Well, well; I am grave enough.

NILS LYKKE.

In the Dales you called yourself a Count's son;—is't not so?

NILS STENSSON.

Nay—begin you now on t h a t again? Have I not made free confession——

NILS LYKKE.

You mistake me. What you said in the Dales was the truth.

NILS STENSSON.

The truth? What mean you by that? Tell me but——!

NILS LYKKE.

First your oath! The holiest, the most inviolable you can swear.

NILS STENSSON.

That you shall have. Yonder on the wall hangs the picture of the Holy Virgin——

NILS LYKKE.

The Holy Virgin has grown infirm of late. Know you not what the monk of Wittenberg maintains?

NILS STENSSON.

Fie! how can you heed the monk of Wittenberg? Peter Kanzler says he is a heretic.

NILS LYKKE.

Well, let us not dispute the matter. Here can I show you a saint will serve full well to make oath by. [*Points to a picture hanging on one of the panels.*] Come hither, —swear that you will be silent till I myself release your tongue—silent, as you hope for Heaven's salvation for yourself and for the man whose picture hangs there.

NILS STENSSON.

[*Approaching the picture.*] I swear it—so help me God's holy word! [*Falls back a step in amazement.*] But—Christ save me——!

NILS LYKKE.

What now?

NILS STENSSON.

The picture—! Sure 'tis I myself!

NILS LYKKE.

'Tis old Sten Sture, even as he lived and moved in his youthful years.

NILS STENSSON.

Sten Sture!—And the likeness—? And—said you not I spoke the truth, when I called myself a Count's son? Was't not so?

NILS LYKKE.

So it was.

NILS STENSSON.

Ah, I have it, I have it! I am——

NILS LYKKE.

You are Sten Sture's son, good Sir!

NILS STENSSON.

[*With the quiet of amazement.*] *I* Sten Sture's son!

NILS LYKKE.

On the mother's side too your blood is noble. Peter Kanzler spoke not the truth, if he said that a poor peasant woman was your mother.

NILS STENSSON.

Oh strange! oh marvellous! But can I believe——?

NILS LYKKE.

You may believe all that I tell you. But remember, all this will be merely your ruin, if you should forget what you swore to me by your father's salvation.

NILS STENSSON.

Forget it? Nay, t h a t you may be sure I never shall. —But you, to whom I have given my word,—tell me—who are you?

NILS LYKKE.

My name is Nils Lykke.

NILS STENSSON.

[*Surprised.*] Nils Lykke? Surely not the Danish Councillor?

NILS LYKKE.

Even so.

NILS STENSSON.

And it was you—? 'Tis strange. How come you——?

NILS LYKKE.

——to be receiving missives from Peter Kanzler? You marvel at that?

NILS STENSSON.

I cannot deny it. He has ever named you as our bitterest foe——.

NILS LYKKE.

And therefore you mistrust me?

NILS STENSSON.

Nay, not wholly that; but—well, the devil take musing!

NILS LYKKE.

Well said. Go but your own way, and you are as sure of the halter as you are of a Count's title and a chain of gold if you trust to me.

NILS STENSSON.

That will I. My hand upon it, dear Sir! Do you but help me with good counsel as long as there is need; when counsel gives place to blows, I shall look to myself.

NILS LYKKE.

'Tis well. Come with me now into yonder chamber, and I will tell you how all these matters stand, and what you have still to do. [*Goes out to the right.*

NILS STENSSON.

[*With a glance at the picture.*] *I* Sten Sture's son! Oh, marvellous as a dream——!

[*Goes out after* NILS LYKKE.

ACT FOURTH

The Banquet Hall, as before, but without the supper-table.

BIÖRN, *the majordomo, enters carrying a lighted branch-candlestick, and lighting in* LADY INGER *and* OLAF SKAKTAVL *by the second door on the left.* LADY INGER *has a bundle of papers in her hand.*

LADY INGER.

[*To* BIÖRN.] And you are sure my daughter had speech with the knight, here in the hall?

BIÖRN.

[*Putting down the branch-candlestick on the table on the left.*] Sure as may be. I met her even as she stepped into the passage.

LADY INGER.

And she seemed greatly moved? Said you not so?

BIÖRN.

She looked all pale and disturbed. I asked if she were sick; she answered not, but said: "Go to my mother and tell her the knight sets forth from here ere day-break; if she have letters or messages for him, beg her not to delay him needlessly." And then she added somewhat that I heard not rightly.

LADY INGER.

Did you not hear it at all?

BIÖRN.

It sounded to me as though she said:—"Almost I fear he has already tarried too long at Östråt."

LADY INGER.

And the knight? Where is he?

BIÖRN.

In his chamber belike, in the gate-wing.

LADY INGER.

It is well. What I have to send by him is ready. Go to him and say I await him here in the hall.

[BIÖRN *goes out to the right.*

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Know you, Lady Inger,—'tis true that in such things I am blind as a mole; yet seems it to me as though— — h'm!

LADY INGER.

Well?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

——as though Nils Lykke bore a mind to your daughter.

LADY INGER.

Then 'twould seem you are not so blind after all; for I am the more deceived if you be not right. Marked

you not at the supper-board how eagerly he listened to the least word I let fall concerning Elina?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

He forgot both food and drink.

LADY INGER.

And our secret affairs as well.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Ay, and what is more—the papers from Peter Kanzler.

LADY INGER.

And from all this you conclude——?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

From all this I chiefly conclude that, as you know Nils Lykke and the name he bears, especially in all that touches women——

LADY INGER.

——I should be right glad to know him outside my gates?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Ay; and that as soon as may be.

LADY INGER.

[*Smiling.*] Nay—the case is just the contrary, Olaf Skaktavl!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

How mean you?

LADY INGER.

If things be as we both think, Nils Lykke must in nowise depart from Östråt yet awhile.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*Looks at her with disapproval.*] Are you again embarked on crooked courses, Lady Inger? What guile are you now devising? Something that may increase your own power at the cost of our——

LADY INGER.

Oh this blindness, that makes you all do me such wrong! I see well you think I purpose to make Nils Lykke my daughter's husband. Were such a thought in my mind, why had I refused to take part in what is afoot in Sweden, when Nils Lykke and all the Danish crew seem willing to support it?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Then if it be not your wish to win him and bind him to you—what would you with him?

LADY INGER.

I will tell you in few words. In a letter to me, Nils Lykke has spoken of the high fortune it were to be allied to our house; and I do not say but, for a moment, I let myself think of the matter.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Ay, see you!

LADY INGER.

To wed Nils Lykke to one of my house were doubtless a great step towards stanching many discords in our land.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Meseems your daughter Merete's marriage with Vinzents Lunge might have taught you what comes of such a step. Scarce had my lord gained firm footing among us, when he began to make free with both our goods and our rights——

LADY INGER.

I know it even too well, Olaf Skaktavl! But times there be when my thoughts are manifold and strange. I cannot impart them fully either to you or to any one else. Often I know not the right course to choose. And yet —a second time to make a Danish lord my son-in-law, —nought but the uttermost need could drive me to that resource; and Heaven be praised—things have not yet come to t h a t!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

I am no wiser than before, Lady Inger;—why would you keep Nils Lykke at Östråt?

LADY INGER.

[*In a low voice.*] Because I owe him an undying hate. Nils Lykke has done me deadlier wrong than any other man. I cannot tell you wherein it lies; but never shall I rest till I am avenged on him. See you not now? Say that Nils Lykke were to love my daughter—as meseems were like enough. I will persuade him to tarry

here; he shall learn to know Elina well. She is both fair and wise.—Ah, if he should one day come before me, with hot love in his heart, to beg for her hand! Then—to chase him away like a dog; to drive him off with jibes and scorn; to make it known over all the land that Nils Lykke had come a-wooing to Östråt in vain—! I tell you I would give ten years of my life but to see that day!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

In faith and truth, Inger Gyldenlöve—is t h i s your purpose towards him?

LADY INGER.

This and nought else, as sure as God lives! Trust me, Olaf Skaktavl, I mean honestly by my countrymen; but I am in nowise my own mistress. Things there be that must be kept hidden, or 'twere my death-blow. But let me once be secure on t h a t side, and you shall see if I have forgotten the oath I swore by Knut Alfson's bier.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*Shakes her by the hand.*] Thanks for those words! I am loath indeed to think evil of you.—Yet, touching your design towards this knight, methinks 'tis a venturesome game you would play. What if you had misreckoned? What if your daughter—? 'Tis said no woman can stand against this subtle devil.

LADY INGER.

My daughter? Think you that she—? Nay, have no fear of that; I know Elina better. All she has heard

of his renown has but made her hate him the more. You saw with your own eyes——

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Ay, but—a woman's mind is shifting ground to build on. 'Twere best you looked well before you.

LADY INGER.

That will I, be sure; I will watch them narrowly. But even were he to succeed in luring her into his toils, I have but to whisper two words in her ear, and——

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

What then?

LADY INGER.

——She will shrink from him as though he came straight from the foul Tempter himself.

Hist, Olaf Skaktavl! Here he comes. Now be cautious.

[NILS LYKKE *enters by the foremost door on the right.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*Approaches* LADY INGER *courteously.*] My noble hostess has summoned me.

LADY INGER.

I have learned through my daughter that you are minded to leave us to-night.

NILS LYKKE.

Even so, to my sorrow;—since my business at Östråt is over.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Not before I have the papers.

NILS LYKKE.

True, true. I had well-nigh forgot the weightiest part of my errand. 'Twas the fault of our noble hostess. With such gracious skill did she keep her guests in talk at table——

LADY INGER.

That you no longer remembered what had brought you hither? I rejoice to hear it; for that was my design. Methought that if my guest, Nils Lykke, were to feel at his ease in Östråt, he must forget——

NILS LYKKE.

What, lady?

LADY INGER.

——First of all his errand—and then all that had gone before it.

NILS LYKKE.

[*To* OLAF SKAKTAVL, *as he takes out the packet and hands it to him.*] The papers from Peter Kanzler. You will find in them a full account of our partizans in Sweden.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

It is well.

[*Sits down by the table on the left, where he opens the packet and examines its contents.*

NILS LYKKE.

And now, Lady Inger Gyldenlöve,—I know not that there is aught else for me to do here.

LADY INGER.

Had it been things of state alone that brought us together, you might be right. But I should be loath to think so

NILS LYKKE.

You would say——?

LADY INGER.

I would say that 'twas not alone as a Danish Councillor or as the ally of Peter Kanzler that Nils Lykke came to be my guest.—Do I err in fancying that somewhat you may have heard down in Denmark may have made you curious to know more of the Lady of Östråt?

NILS LYKKE.

Far be it from me to deny——

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*Turning over the papers.*] Strange. No letter.

NILS LYKKE.

——Lady Inger Gyldenlöve's fame is all too widely spread that I should not long have been eager to see her face to face.

LADY INGER.

So I thought. But what, then, is an hour's jesting talk at the supper-table? Let us try to sweep away all that has till now lain between us; it may well come to pass that the Nils Lykke I know may wipe out the grudge I bore the one I knew not. Prolong your stay

here but a few days, Sir Councillor! I dare not persuade Olaf Skaktavl thereto, since his secret charge in Sweden calls him hence. But as for you, doubtless your sagacity has placed all things beforehand in such train that your presence can scarce be needed. Trust me, your time shall not pass tediously with us; at least you will find both me and my daughter heartily disposed to do all in our power to pleasure you.

NILS LYKKE.

I doubt neither your goodwill towards me nor your daughter's; of that I have had ample proof. And I trust you will not doubt that my presence elsewhere must be vitally needful, since, despite of all, I must declare my longer stay at Östråt impossible.

LADY INGER.

Is it even so!—Know you, Sir Councillor, were I evilly minded, I might fancy you had come to Östråt to try a fall with me, and that, having lost, you cared not to linger on the battle-field among the witnesses of your defeat.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Smiling.*] There might be some show of reason for such a reading of the case; but sure it is that as yet *I* hold not the battle lost.

LADY INGER.

However that may be, it might at any rate be retrieved, if you would tarry some days with us. You see yourself, I am still halting and wavering at the parting of the ways,—persuading my redoubtable assailant not to quit

the field.—Well, to speak plainly, the thing is this: your alliance with the disaffected in Sweden still seems to me somewhat—how shall I call it?—somewhat miraculous, Sir Councillor! I tell you this frankly, dear Sir! The thought that has moved the King's Council to this secret step is in truth most politic; but 'tis strangely at variance with the deeds of certain of your countrymen in bygone years. Be not offended, then, if my trust in your fair promises needs to be somewhat strengthened ere I can place my whole welfare in your hands.

NILS LYKKE.

A longer stay at Östråt would scarce help towards that end; since I purpose not to make any further effort to shake your resolve.

LADY INGER.

Then must I pity you from my heart. Ay, Sir Councillor—'tis true I stand here an unfriended widow; yet may you trust my word when I foretell that this visit to Östråt will strew your future path with thorns.

NILS LYKKE.

[*With a smile.*] Is that your forecast, Lady Inger?

LADY INGER.

Truly it is! What can one say, dear Sir? 'Tis an age of tattling tongues. Many a scurril knave will make jeering rhymes at your expense. Ere half a year is out, you will be all men's fable; people will stop and gaze after you on the high-roads; 'twill be: "Look, look; there rides Sir Nils Lykke, that fared north to Östråt to

trap Inger Gyldenlöve, and was caught in his own nets." —Softly, softly, Sir Knight, why so impatient! 'Tis not that *I* think so; I do but forecast the thoughts of the malicious and evil-minded; and of them, alas! there are many.—Ay, 'tis shame; but so it is—you will reap nought but mockery—mockery, because a woman was craftier than you. "Like a cunning fox," men will say, "he crept into Östråt; like a beaten hound he slunk away." —And one thing more: think you not that Peter Kanzler and his friends will forswear your alliance, when 'tis known that *I* venture not to fight under a standard borne by you?

NILS LYKKE.

You speak wisely, lady! Wherefore to secure me from mockery—and not to endanger the alliance with all our dear friends in Sweden—I must needs——

LADY INGER.

[*Hastily.*] ——prolong your stay at Östråt.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*Who has been listening.*] He is in the trap!

NILS LYKKE.

No, my noble lady;—I must needs bring you to terms within this hour.

LADY INGER.

But what if you should fail?

NILS LYKKE.

I shall n o t fail.

LADY INGER.

You lack not confidence, it seems.

NILS LYKKE.

What shall be the wager that you make not common cause with myself and Peter Kanzler?

LADY INGER.

Östråt Castle against your knee-buckles!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Slaps his breast and cries:*] Olaf Skaktavl—here stands the master of Östråt!

LADY INGER.

Sir Councillor——!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*Rises from the table.*] What now?

NILS LYKKE.

[*To* LADY INGER.] I accept not the wager; for in a moment you will gladly give Östråt Castle, and more to boot, to be freed from the snare wherein not I but you are tangled.

LADY INGER.

Your jest, Sir, grows a vastly merry one.

NILS LYKKE.

'Twill be merrier yet—at least for me. You boast that you have overreached me. You threaten to heap

on me all men's scorn and mockery. Ah, beware that you stir not up my vengefulness; for with two words I can bring you to your knees at my feet.

LADY INGER.

Ha-ha— —! [*Stops suddenly, as if struck by a foreboding.*] And these two words, Nils Lykke?—these two words——?

NILS LYKKE.

——The secret of Sten Sture's son and yours.

LADY INGER.

[*With a shriek.*] Oh, God in heaven——!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Inger Gyldenlöve's son! What say you?

LADY INGER.

[*Half kneeling to* NILS LYKKE.] Mercy! oh, be merciful——!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Raises her up.*] Collect yourself, and let us talk together calmly.

LADY INGER.

[*In a low voice, as though bewildered.*] Did you hear it, Olaf Skaktavl? Or was it but a dream? Heard you what he said?

NILS LYKKE.

It was no dream, Lady Inger!

LADY INGER.

[*Clasping her hands.*] And you know it! You,—you!—Where is he then? Where have you got him? What would you do with him? [*Screams.*] Do not kill him, Nils Lykke! Give him back to me! Do not kill my child!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Ah, I begin to understand——

LADY INGER.

And this fear—this torturing dread! Through all these weary years it has been ever with me— —and then all fails at last, and I must bear this agony!—Oh Lord my God, is it right of thee? Was it for this thou gavest him to me?

[*Controls herself and says with forced composure:*

Nils Lykke—tell me o n e thing. Where have you got him? Where is he?

NILS LYKKE.

With his foster-father.

LADY INGER.

Still with his foster-father. Oh, that merciless man—! For ever to deny me—. But it m u s t not go on thus! Help me, Olaf Skaktavl!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

I?

NILS LYKKE.

There will be no need, if only you——

LADY INGER.

Hearken, Sir Councillor! What you know you shall know thoroughly. And you too, my old and faithful friend!

Listen then. To-night you bade me call to mind that fatal day when Knut Alfson was slain at Oslo. You bade me remember the promise I made as I stood by his corpse amid the bravest men in Norway. I was scarce full-grown then; but I felt God's strength in me, and methought, as many have thought since, that the Lord himself had set his mark on me and chosen me to fight in the forefront for my country's cause.

Was it pride of heart? Or was it a calling from on high? That I have never clearly known. But woe to whoso is charged with a mighty task.

For seven years I fear not to say that I kept my promise faithfully. I stood by my countrymen in all their sufferings and their need. Playmates of mine, all over the land, were wives and mothers now. I alone could give ear to no wooer—not to one. That you know best, Olaf Skaktavl!

Then I saw Sten Sture for the first time. Fairer man had never met my sight.

NILS LYKKE.

Ah, now it grows clear to me! Sten Sture was then in Norway on a secret errand. We Danes were not to know that he wished your friends well.

LADY INGER.

In the guise of a mean serving-man he lived a whole winter under one roof with me.

That winter I thought less and less of the country's weal.— — So fair a man had I never seen—and I had lived well-nigh five-and-twenty years.

Next autumn Sten Sture came once more; and when he departed again he took with him, in all secrecy, a little child. 'Twas not folks' evil tongues I feared; but our cause would have suffered had it got abroad that Sten Sture stood so near to me.

The child was given to Peter Kanzler to rear. I waited for better times, that were soon to come. They never came. Sten Sture took a wife two years later in Sweden, and, when he died, he left a widow——

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

——And with her a lawful heir to his name and rights.

LADY INGER.

Time after time I wrote to Peter Kanzler beseeching him to give me back my child. But he was ever deaf to my prayers. "Cast in your lot with us once for all," he said, "and I send your son back to Norway; not before." But 'twas even that I dared not do. We of the disaffected party were then ill regarded by many timorous folk in the land. Had these learnt how things stood—oh, I know it!—to cripple the mother they had gladly meted to the child the fate that would have been King Christiern's had he not saved himself by flight.[1]

[1] King Christian II. of Denmark (the perpetrator of the massacre at Stockholm known as the Blood-Bath) fled to Holland in 1523, five years before the date assigned to this play, in order to escape death or imprisonment at the hands of his rebellious nobles, who summoned his uncle, Frederick I., to the throne. Returning to Denmark in 1532, Christian was thrown into prison, where he spent the last twenty-seven years of his life.

But, besides that, the Danes, too, were active. They spared neither threats nor promises to force me to join them.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

'Twas but reason. The eyes of all men were fixed on you as on the vane that should show them how to shape their course.

LADY INGER.

Then came Herlof Hyttefad's rising. Do you remember that time, Olaf Skaktavl? Was it not as though a new spring had dawned over the whole land! Mighty voices summoned me to come forth;—yet I dared not. I stood doubting—far from the strife—in my lonely castle. At times it seemed as though the Lord God himself were calling me; but then would come the killing dread again to benumb my will. "Who will win?"—t h a t was the question that was ever ringing in my ears.

'Twas but a short spring that had come to Norway. Herlof Hyttefad, and many more with him, were broken on the wheel during the months that followed. None could call me to account; yet there lacked not covert threats from Denmark. What if they knew the secret? At last methought they m u s t know; I knew not how else to understand their words.

'Twas even in that time of agony that Gyldenlöve, the High Steward, came hither and sought me in marriage. Let any mother anguished for her child think herself in my place!—A month after, I was the High Steward's wife—and homeless in the hearts of my countrymen.

Then came the quiet years. No one raised his head any more. Our masters might grind us down even as

heavily as they listed. There were times when I loathed myself; for what had I to do? Nought but to endure terror and scorn and bring forth daughters into the world. My daughters! God must forgive me if I have had no mother's heart towards them. My wifely duties were as serfdom to me; how then could I love my daughters? Oh, how different with my son! He was the child of my very soul. He was the one thing that brought to mind the time when I was a woman and nought but a woman.—And him they had taken from me! He was growing up among strangers, who might, mayhap, be sowing in him the seed of corruption! Olaf Skaktavl —had I wandered, like you, on the lonely hills, hunted and forsaken, in winter and storm—if I had but held my child in my arms,—trust me, I had not sorrowed and wept so sore as I have sorrowed and wept for him from his birth even to this hour!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

There is my hand. I have judged you too hardly, Lady Inger! Command me even as before; I will obey. —Ay, by all the saints, I know what it is to sorrow for a child.

LADY INGER.

Yours was slain by men of blood. But what is death to the restless terror of all these long years?

NILS LYKKE.

Mark, then—'tis in your power to end this terror. You have but to make peace between the jarring factions, and neither will think of seizing on your child as a pledge of your faith.

LADY INGER.

[*To herself.*] This is the vengeance of Heaven. [*Looks at him.*] In one word, what do you demand?

NILS LYKKE.

I demand first that you shall call the people of the northern districts to arms, in support of the disaffected in Sweden.

LADY INGER.

And next——?

NILS LYKKE.

——that you do your best to advance young Count Sture's ancestral claim to the throne of Sweden.

LADY INGER.

His? You demand that I——

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*Softly.*] It is the wish of many Swedes, and 'twould serve our turn too.

NILS LYKKE.

You hesitate, lady? You tremble for your son's safety. What better can you wish than to see his half-brother on the throne?

LADY INGER.

[*In thought.*] True—true——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Looks at her sharply.*] Unless there be other plans afoot——

LADY INGER.

What mean you?

NILS LYKKE.

Inger Gyldenlöve might have a mind to be—a king's mother.

LADY INGER.

No, no! Give me back my child, and let who will have the crowns.

But know you so surely that Count Sture is willing——?

NILS LYKKE.

Of that he will himself assure you.

LADY INGER.

Himself? And when?

NILS LYKKE.

Even now.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

How now?

LADY INGER.

What say you?

NILS LYKKE.

In one word, Count Sture is in Östråt.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Here?

NILS LYKKE.

[*To* LADY INGER.] You have doubtless heard that another rode through the gate along with me? The Count was my attendant.

LADY INGER.

[*Softly.*] I am in his power. I have no longer any choice. [*Looks at him and says:*] 'Tis well, Sir Councillor—you shall have full assurance of my support.

NILS LYKKE.

In writing?

LADY INGER.

As you will.

[*Goes to the table on the left, sits down, and takes writing materials from the drawer.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside, standing by the table on the right.*] At last, then, I win!

LADY INGER.

[*After a moment's thought, turns suddenly in her chair to* OLAF SKAKTAVL *and whispers.*] Olaf Skaktavl—I am certain of it now—Nils Lykke is a traitor!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*Softly.*] What? You think——?

LADY INGER.

He has treachery in his heart.

[*Lays the paper before her and dips the pen in the ink.*

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

And yet you would give him a written promise that may be your ruin?

LADY INGER.

Hush; leave me to act. Nay, wait and listen first——
[*Talks with him in a whisper.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*Softly, watching them.*] Ah, take counsel together as much as ye list! All danger is over now. With her written consent in my pocket, I can denounce her whenever I please. A secret message to Jens Bielke this very night—. I tell him but the truth—that the young Count Sture is not at Östråt. And then to-morrow, when the road is open—to Trondhiem with my young friend, and thence by ship to Copenhagen with him as my prisoner. Once we have him safe in the castle-tower, we can dictate to Lady Inger what terms we will. And I—? After this, methinks, the King will scarce place the French mission in other hands than mine.

LADY INGER.

[*Still whispering to* OLAF SKAKTAVL.] Well, you understand me?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Ay, fully. Let us make the venture, even as you will.
[*Goes out by the back, to the right.*

[NILS STENSSON *comes in by the first door on the right, unseen by* LADY INGER, *who has begun to write.*

NILS STENSSON.

[*In a low voice.*] Sir Knight,—Sir Knight!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Moves towards him.*] Rash boy! What would you here? Said I not you should wait within until I called you?

NILS STENSSON.

How could I? Now you have told me that Inger Gyldenlöve is my mother, I thirst more than ever to see her face to face——

Oh, it is she! How proud and high her mien! Even thus did I ever picture her. Fear not, dear Sir,—I shall do nought rashly. Since I have learnt this secret, I feel, as it were, older and wiser. I will no longer be wild and heedless; I will be even as other well-born youths.—Tell me,—knows she that I am here? Surely you have prepared her?

NILS LYKKE.

Ay, sure enough; but——

NILS STENSSON.

Well?

NILS LYKKE.

——She will not own you for her son.

NILS STENSSON.

Will not own me? But she i s my mother.—Oh, if it be that she doubts t h a t—[*takes out a ring which he wears on a cord round his neck*]—show her this ring. I have worn it since my earliest childhood; she must surely know its history.

NILS LYKKE.

Hide the ring, man! Hide it, I say!

You mistake me. Lady Inger doubts not at all that you are her child; but—ay, look about you; look at all this wealth; look at these mighty forefathers and kinsmen whose pictures deck the walls both high and low; look lastly at herself, the haughty dame, used to bear sway as the first noblewoman in the kingdom. Think you it can be to her mind to take a poor ignorant youth by the hand before all men's eyes and say: Behold my son!

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, doubtless you are right. I am poor and ignorant. I have nought to offer her in return for what I crave. Oh, never have I felt my poverty weigh on me till this hour! But tell me—what think you I should do to win her favour? Tell me, dear Sir; sure you must know!

NILS LYKKE.

You must win your father's kingdom. But until that may be, look well that you wound not her ears by hinting at kinship or the like. She will bear her as though she believed you to be the real Count Sture, until you have made yourself worthy to be called her son.

NILS STENSSON.

Oh, but tell me——!

NILS LYKKE.

Hush; hush!

LADY INGER.

[*Rises and hands him a paper.*] Sir Knight—here is my promise.

NILS LYKKE.

I thank you.

LADY INGER.

[*Notices* NILS STENSSON.] Ah, — this young man is——?

NILS LYKKE.

Ay, Lady Inger, he is Count Sture.

LADY INGER.

[*Aside, looks at him stealthily.*] Feature for feature; —ay, by God,—it is Sten Sture's son!

[*Approaches him and says with cold courtesy:*

I bid you welcome under my roof, Count! It rests with you whether or not we shall bless this meeting a year hence.

NILS STENSSON.

With me? Oh, do but tell me what I must do! Trust me, I have both courage and will——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Listens uneasily.*] What is this noise and uproar, Lady Inger? There are people pressing hitherward. What does this mean?

LADY INGER.

[*In a loud voice.*] 'Tis the spirits awaking!

[OLAF SKAKTAVL, EINAR HUK, BIÖRN, FINN, *and a number of* PEASANTS *and* RETAINERS *come in from the back, on the right.*

THE PEASANTS AND RETAINERS.

Hail to Lady Inger Gyldenlöve!

LADY INGER.

[*To* OLAF SKAKTAVL.] Have you told them what is afoot?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

I have told them all they need to know.

LADY INGER.

[*To the* CROWD.] Ay, now, my faithful house-folk and peasants, now must ye arm you as best you can and will. That which earlier to-night I forbade you, ye have now my fullest leave to do. And here I present to you the young Count Sture, the coming ruler of Sweden —and Norway too, if God will it so.

THE WHOLE CROWD.

Hail to him! Hail to Count Sture!

[*General excitement. The* PEASANTS *and* RETAINERS *choose out weapons and put on breastplates and helmets, amid great noise.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*Softly and uneasily.*] The spirits awaking, she said? I but feigned to conjure up the devil of revolt—'twere a cursed spite if he got the upper hand of us.

LADY INGER.

[*To* NILS STENSSON.] Here I give you the first earnest of our service—thirty mounted men, to follow you as a bodyguard. Trust me—ere you reach the frontier many hundreds will have ranged themselves under my banner and yours. Go, then, and God be with you!

NILS STENSSON.

Thanks,—Inger Gyldenlöve! Thanks—and be sure you shall never have cause to shame you for—for Count Sture! If you see me again, I shall have won my father's kingdom.

NILS LYKKE.

[*To himself.*] Ay, if she see you again!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

The horses wait, good fellows! Are ye ready——?

THE PEASANTS.

Ay, ay, ay!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Uneasily, to* LADY INGER.] What? You mean not to-night, even now——?

LADY INGER.

This very moment, Sir Knight!

NILS LYKKE.

Nay, nay, impossible!

LADY INGER.

I have said it.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Softly, to* NILS STENSSON.] Obey her not!

NILS STENSSON.

How can I do aught else? I will; I must!

NILS LYKKE.

your certain ruin——

NILS STENSSON.

then! Her must I obey in all things——

NILS LYKKE.

[*With authority.*] And me?

NILS STENSSON.

I shall keep my word; be sure of that. The secret shall not pass my lips till you yourself release me. But she is my mother!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside.*] And Jens Bielke in wait on the road! Damnation! He will snatch the prize out of my fingers—— [*To* LADY INGER.] Wait till to-morrow!

LADY INGER.

[*To* NILS STENSSON.] Count Sture—do you obey me or not?

NILS STENSSON.

To horse! [*Goes up towards the background.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside.*] Unhappy boy! He knows not what he does. [*To* LADY INGER.

Well, since so it must be,—farewell!

[*Bows hastily, and begins to move away.*

LADY INGER.

[*Detains him.*] Nay, stay! Not so, Sir Knight,—not so!

NILS LYKKE.

What mean you?

LADY INGER.

[*In a low voice.*] Nils Lykke—you are a traitor! Hush! Let no one see there is discord in the camp of the leaders. You have won Peter Kanzler's trust by some devilish wile that as yet is dark to me. You have forced me to rebellious acts—not to help our cause, but to further your own plots, whatever they may be. I can draw back no more. But think not therefore that you have conquered! I shall know how to make you harmless——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Lays his hand involuntarily on his sword.*] Lady Inger!

LADY INGER.

Be calm, Sir Councillor! Your life is safe. But you come not outside the gates of Östråt before victory is ours.

NILS LYKKE.

Death and destruction!

LADY INGER.

It boots not to resist. You come not from this place. So rest you quiet; 'tis your wisest course.

NILS LYKKE.

[*To himself.*] Ah,—I am overreached. She has been craftier than I. [*A thought strikes him.*] But if I yet——?

LADY INGER.

[*To* OLAF SKAKTAVL.] Ride with Count Sture's troops to the frontier; then without pause to Peter Kanzler, and bring me back my child. Now has he no longer any plea for keeping from me what is my own.

[*Adds, as* OLAF SKAKTAVL *is going:*

Wait; a token—. He that wears Sten Sture's ring, he is my son.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

By all the saints, you shall have him!

LADY INGER.

Thanks,—thanks, my faithful friend!

NILS LYKKE.

[*To* FINN, *whom he has beckoned to him unobserved, and with whom he has been whispering.*] Good—now contrive to slip out. Let none see you. The Swedes are in ambush half a league hence. Tell the commander that Count Sture is dead. The young man you see there must on no account be touched. Tell the commander so. Tell him the boy's life is worth thousands to me.

FINN.

It shall be done.

LADY INGER.

[*Who has meanwhile been watching* NILS LYKKE.] And now go, all of you, and God be with you! [*Points*

to NILS LYKKE.] This noble knight cannot find it in his heart to leave his friends at Östråt so hastily. He will abide here with me till the tidings of your victory arrive.

NILS LYKKE.

[*To himself.*] Devil!

NILS STENSSON.

[*Seizes his hand.*] Trust me—you shall not have long to wait!

NILS LYKKE.

It is well; it is well! [*Aside.*] All may yet be saved. If only my message reach Jens Bielke in time——

LADY INGER.

[*To* EINAR HUK, *the bailiff, pointing to* FINN.] And let t h a t man be placed under close guard in the castle dungeon.

FINN.

Me?

THE BAILIFF AND THE SERVANTS.

Finn!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside.*] My last anchor gone!

LADY INGER.

[*Imperatively.*] To the dungeon with him!

[EINAR HUK, BIÖRN, *and a couple of the house-servants lead* FINN *out to the left.*

ALL THE REST.

[*Except* NILS LYKKE, *rushing out to the right.*] Away! To horse,—to horse! Hail to Lady Inger Gyldenlöve!

LADY INGER.

[*Passing close to* NILS LYKKE *as she goes out after the others.*] Who wins?

NILS LYKKE.

[*Remains alone.*] Who? Ay, woe to you;—your victory will cost you dear. *I* wash my hands of it. 'Tis not *I* that am murdering him.

But my prey is escaping me none the less; and the revolt will grow and spread!—Ah, 'tis a foolhardy, a frantic game I have here taken in hand! [*Listens at the window.*] There they ride clattering out through the gateway.—Now 'tis closed after them—and I am left here a prisoner.

No way of escape! Within half-an-hour the Swedes will be upon him. He has thirty well-armed horsemen with him. 'Twill be life or death.

But if, after all, they should take him alive?—Were I but free, I could overtake the Swedes ere they reach the frontier, and make them deliver him up. [*Goes towards the window in the background and looks out.*] Damnation! Guards outside on every hand. Can there be no way of escape?

[*Comes quickly forward again; suddenly stops and listens.*

What is that? Music and singing. It seems to come from Elina's chamber. Ay, 'tis she that is singing. Then she is still awake—— [*A thought seems to strike*

him.] Elina!—Ah, if t h a t could be! Were it possible to— And why should I not? Am I not still myself? Says not the song:—

Fair maidens a-many they sigh and they pine:
"Ah God, that Nils Lykke were mine, mine, mine."

And she—? — —Elina Gyldenlöve shall set me free!

[*Goes quickly but stealthily towards the first door on the left.*

ACT FIFTH

The Banquet Hall. It is still night. The hall is but dimly lighted by a branch-candlestick on the table, in front, on the right.

LADY INGER *is sitting by the table, deep in thought.*

LADY INGER.

[*After a pause.*] They call me keen-witted beyond all others in the land. I believe they are right. The keenest-witted— No one knows how I became so. For more than twenty years I have fought to save my child. That is the key to the riddle. Ay, that sharpens the wits!

My wits? Where have they flown to-night? What has become of my forethought? There is a ringing and rushing in my ears. I see shapes before me, so lifelike that methinks I could lay hold on them. [*Springs up.*] Lord Jesus—what is this? Am I no longer mistress of my reason? Is it to come to that——? [*Presses her clasped hands over her head; sits down again, and says more calmly:*] Nay, 'tis nought. 'Twill pass. There is no fear;—it will pass.

How peaceful it is in the hall to-night! No threatening looks from forefathers or kinsfolk. No need to turn their faces to the wall. [*Rises again.*] Ay, 'twas well that I took heart at last. We shall conquer;—and then am I at the goal of all my longings. I shall have my

child again. [*Takes up the light as if to go, but stops and says musingly:*] At the goal? The goal? To have him back? Is that all?—is there nought further? [*Sets the light down on the table.*] That heedless word that Nils Lykke threw forth at random—. How could he see my unborn thought? [*More softly.*

A king's mother? A king's mother, he said— And why not? Have not my fathers before me ruled as kings, even though they bore not the kingly name? Has not my son as good a title as the other to the rights of the house of Sture? In the sight of God he has—if so be there is justice in Heaven.

And in an hour of terror I have signed away his rights. I have recklessly squandered them, as a ransom for his freedom.

If they could be recovered?—Would Heaven be angered, if I—? Would it call down fresh troubles on my head if I were to—? Who knows;—who knows! It may be safest to refrain. [*Takes up the light again.*] I shall have my child again. T h a t must content me. I will try to rest. All these desperate thoughts,—I will sleep them away.

[*Goes towards the back, but stops in the middle of the hall, and says broodingly:*

A king's mother!

[*Goes slowly out at the back, to the left.*

[*After a short pause,* NILS LYKKE *and* ELINA GYLDENLÖVE *enter noiselessly by the first door on the left.* NILS LYKKE *has a small lantern in his hand.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*Throws the light from his lantern around, so as to search the room.*] All is still. I must begone.

ELINA.

Oh, let me look but once more into your eyes, before you leave me.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Embraces her.*] Elina!

ELINA.

[*After a short pause.*] Will you come nevermore to Östråt?

NILS LYKKE.

How can you doubt that I will come? Are you not henceforth my betrothed?—But will y o u be true to m e, Elina? Will you not forget me ere we meet again?

ELINA.

Do you ask if I w i l l be true? Have I any will left then? Have I power to be untrue to you, even if I would?—You came by night; you knocked upon my door; —and I opened to you. You spoke to me. What was it you said? You gazed in my eyes. What was the mystic might that turned my brain, and lured me as into a magic net? [*Hides her face on his shoulder.*] Oh, look not on me, Nils Lykke! You must not look upon me after this— True, say you? Do you not own me? I am yours;—I m u s t be yours—to all eternity.

NILS LYKKE.

Now, by my knightly honour, ere the year be past, you shall sit as my wife in the hall of my fathers!

ELINA.

No vows, Nils Lykke! No oaths to me.

NILS LYKKE.

What ails you? Why do you shake your head so mournfully?

ELINA.

Because I know that the same soft words wherewith you turned my brain, you have whispered to so many a one before. Nay, nay, be not angry, my beloved! In nowise do I reproach you, as I did while yet I knew you not. Now I understand how high above all others is your goal. How can love be aught to y o u but a pastime, or woman but a toy?

NILS LYKKE.

Elina,—hear me!

ELINA.

As I grew up, your name was ever in my ears. I hated the name, for meseemed that all women were dishonoured by your life. And yet,—how strange!—when I built up in my dreams the life that should be mine, you were ever my hero, though I knew it not. Now I understand it all. What was it that I felt? It was a foreboding, a mysterious longing for you, you only one —for you that were one day to come and reveal to me all the glory of life.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside, putting down the lantern on the table.*] How is it with me? This dizzy fascination—. If this it be to

love, then have I never known it till this hour.—Is there not yet time—? Oh horror—Lucia!

[*Sinks into the chair.*

ELINA.

What is amiss with you? So heavy a sigh——

NILS LYKKE.

O, 'tis nought,—nought!

Elina,—now will I confess all to you. I have beguiled many with both words and glances; I have said to many a one what I whispered to you this night. But trust me——

ELINA.

Hush! No more of that. My love is no exchange for that you give me. No, no; I love you because your every glance commands it like a king's decree. [*Lies down at his feet.*] Oh, let me once more stamp that kingly mandate deep into my soul, though well I know it stands imprinted there for all time and eternity.

Dear God—how little I have known myself! 'Twas but to-night I said to my mother: "My pride is my life." And what is now my pride? Is it to know my countrymen free, or my house held in honour throughout many lands? Oh, no, no! My love is my pride. The little dog is proud when he may sit by his master's feet and eat bread-crumbs from his hand. Even so am I proud, so long as I may sit at your feet, while your looks and your words nourish me with the bread of life. See, therefore, I say to you, even as I said but now to my mother: "My love is my life;" for therein lies all my pride, now and evermore.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Raises her up on his lap.*] Nay, nay—not at my feet, but at my side is your place,—how high soever fate may exalt me. Ay, Elina—you have led me into a better path; and should it one day be granted me to atone by a deed of fame for the sins of my reckless youth, then shall the honour be yours and mine together.

ELINA.

Ah, you speak as though I were still that Elina who but this evening flung down the flowers at your feet.

I have read in my books of the many-coloured life in far-off lands. To the winding of horns, the knight rides forth into the greenwood, with his falcon on his wrist. Even so do you go your way through life;—your name rings out before you whithersoever you fare.—All that *I* desire of the glory, is to rest like the falcon on your arm. Like him was I, too, blind to light and life, till you loosed the hood from my eyes and set me soaring high over the tree-tops.—But trust me—bold as my flight may be, yet shall I ever turn back to my cage.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Rises.*] Then will I bid defiance to the past! See now;—take this ring, and be m i n e before God and men—m i n e ,—ay, though it should trouble the dreams of the dead.

ELINA.

You make me tremble. What is it that——?

NILS LYKKE.

'Tis nought. Come, let me place the ring on your finger.—Even so—now are you my betrothed!

ELINA.

I Nils Lykke's bride! It seems but a dream, all that has befallen this night. Oh, but so fair a dream! My breast is so light. No longer is there bitterness and hatred in my soul. I will atone to all whom I have wronged. I have been unloving to my mother. To-morrow will I go to her; she must forgive me where I have erred.

NILS LYKKE.

And give her consent to our bond.

ELINA.

That will she. Oh, I am sure she will. My mother is kind; all the world is kind;—I can no longer feel hatred for any living soul—save o n e .

NILS LYKKE.

Save o n e ?

ELINA.

Ah, 'tis a mournful history. I had a sister——

NILS LYKKE.

Lucia?

ELINA.

Did you know Lucia?

NILS LYKKE.

No, no; I have but heard her name.

ELINA.

She too gave her heart to a knight. He betrayed her; —now she is in Heaven.

NILS LYKKE.

And you——

ELINA.

I hate him.

NILS LYKKE.

Hate him not! If there be mercy in your heart, forgive him his sin. Trust me, he bears his punishment in his own breast.

ELINA.

Him will I never forgive! I c a n n o t, even if I would; for I have sworn so dear an oath—— [*Listening.*] Hush! Can you hear——?

NILS LYKKE.

What? Where?

ELINA.

Without; far off. The noise of many horsemen on the high-road.

NILS LYKKE.

Ah, 'tis t h e y ! And I had forgotten—! They are coming hither. Then is the danger great! I must begone!

ELINA.

But whither? Oh, Nils Lykke, what are you hiding——?

NILS LYKKE.

To-morrow, Elina—; for as God lives, I will return to-morrow.—Quickly now—where is the secret passage whereof you told me?

ELINA.

Through the grave-vault. See,—here is the trap-door——

NILS LYKKE.

The grave-vault! [*To himself.*] No matter, he m u s t be saved!

ELINA.

[*By the window.*] The horsemen have reached the gate—— [*Hands him the lantern.*

NILS LYKKE.

Oh, then—— [*Begins to descend.*

ELINA.

Go forward along the passage till you reach the coffin with the death's-head and the black cross; it is Lucia's——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Climbs back hastily and shuts the trap-door.*] Lucia's! Pah——!

ELINA.

What said you?

NILS LYKKE.

Nay, nothing. 'Twas the air of the graves that made me dizzy.

ELINA.

Hark; they are hammering at the gate!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Lets the lantern fall.*] Ah! too late——!

[BIÖRN *enters hurriedly from the right, carrying a light.*

ELINA.

[*Goes towards him.*] What is amiss, Biörn? What is it?

BIÖRN.

An ambuscade! Count Sture——

ELINA.

Count Sture? What of him?

NILS LYKKE.

Have they killed him?

BIÖRN.

[*To* ELINA.] Where is your mother?

TWO RETAINERS.

[*Rushing in from the right.*] Lady Inger! Lady Inger!

[LADY INGER GYLDENLÖVE *enters by the furthest back door on the left, with a branch-candlestick, lighted, in her hand, and says quickly:*

LADY INGER.

I know all. Down with you to the courtyard! Keep the gate open for our friends, but closed against all others!

[*Puts down the candlestick on the table to the left.* BIÖRN *and the two* RETAINERS *go out again to the right.*

LADY INGER.

[*To* NILS LYKKE.] So t h a t was the trap, Sir Councillor!

NILS LYKKE.

Inger Gyldenlöve, believe me——!

LADY INGER.

An ambuscade that was to snap him up as soon as you had secured the promise that should destroy me!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Takes out the paper and tears it to pieces.*] There is your promise. I keep nothing that can bear witness against you.

LADY INGER.

What is this?

NILS LYKKE.

From this hour will I put your thoughts of me to shame. If I have sinned against you,—by Heaven I will strive to repair my crime. But now I m u s t out, if I have to hew my way through the gate!—Elina—tell your mother all!—And you, Lady Inger, let our reckoning be forgotten! Be generous—and silent! Trust me, ere dawn of day you shall owe me a life's gratitude.

[*Goes out quickly to the right.*

LADY INGER.

[*Looks after him with exultation.*] 'Tis well! I understand him. [*Turns to* ELINA.
Nils Lykke—? Well——?

ELINA.

He knocked upon my door, and set this ring upon my finger.

LADY INGER

And from his soul he holds you dear?

ELINA.

He has said so, and I believe him.

LADY INGER

Bravely done, Elina! Ha-ha, Sir Knight, now is it my turn!

ELINA.

My mother—you are so strange. Ah, yes—I know—'tis my unloving ways that have angered you.

LADY INGER.

Not so, dear Elina! You are an obedient child. You have opened your door to him; you have hearkened to his soft words. I know full well what it must have cost you; for I know your hatred——

ELINA.

But, my mother——

LADY INGER.

Hush! We have played into each other's hands. What wiles did you use, my subtle daughter? I saw the love shine out of his eyes. Hold him fast now! Draw the net closer and closer about him; and then— Ah, Elina, if we could but rend asunder his perjured heart within his breast!

ELINA.

Woe is me—what is it you say?

LADY INGER.

Let not your courage fail you. Hearken to me. I know a word that will keep you firm. Know then— [*Listening.*] They are fighting before the gate. Courage! Now comes the pinch! [*Turns again to* ELINA.] Know then: Nils Lykke was the man that brought your sister to her grave.

ELINA.

[*With a shriek.*] Lucia!

LADY INGER.

He it was, as truly as there is an Avenger above us!

ELINA.

Then Heaven be with me!

LADY INGER.

[*Appalled.*] Elina——?!

ELINA.

I am his bride in the sight of God.

LADY INGER.

Unhappy child,—what have you done?

ELINA.

[*In a toneless voice.*] Made shipwreck of my soul.—Good-night, my mother! [*She goes out to the left.*

LADY INGER.

Ha-ha-ha! It goes down-hill apace with Inger Gyldenlöve's house. T h e r e went the last of my daughters.

Why could I not keep silence? Had she known nought, it may be she had been happy—after a kind.

It w a s to be so. It is written up yonder in the stars that I am to break off one green branch after another till the trunk stand leafless at last.

'Tis well, 'tis well! I shall have my son again. Of the others, of my daughters, I will not think.

My reckoning? To face my reckoning?—It falls not due till the last great day of wrath.—T h a t comes not yet awhile.

NILS STENSSON.

[*Calling from outside on the right.*] Ho—shut the gate!

LADY INGER.

Count Sture's voice——!

NILS STENSSON.

[*Rushes in, unarmed, and with his clothes torn, and shouts with a laugh of desperation.*] Well met again, Inger Gyldenlöve!

LADY INGER.

What have you lost?

NILS STENSSON.

My kingdom and my life!

LADY INGER.

And the peasants? My servants?—where are they?

NILS STENSSON.

You will find the carcasses along the highway. Who has the rest, I cannot tell you.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*Outside on the right.*] Count Sture! Where are you?

NILS STENSSON.

Here, here!

[OLAF SKAKTAVL *comes in with his right hand wrapped in a clout.*

LADY INGER.

Alas, Olaf Skaktavl, you too——!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

'Twas impossible to break through.

LADY INGER.

You are wounded, I see!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

A finger the less; that is all.

NILS STENSSON.

Where are the Swedes?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

At our heels. They are breaking open the gate——

NILS STENSSON.

Oh, God! No, no! I c a n n o t—I w i l l not die.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

A hiding-place, Lady Inger! Is there no corner where we can hide him?

LADY INGER.

But if they search the castle——?

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, ay; they will find me! And then to be dragged away to prison, or be strung up——! No, no, Inger Gyldenlöve,—I know full well,—you will never suffer that to be!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*Listening.*] There burst the lock.

LADY INGER.

[*At the window.*] Many men rush in at the gateway.

NILS STENSSON.

And to lose my life n o w ! Now, when my true life was but beginning! Now, when I have so lately

learnt that I have aught to live for. No, no, no!—Think not I am a coward, Inger Gyldenlöve! Might I but have time to show——

LADY INGER.

I hear them now in the hall below.

[*Firmly to* OLAF SKAKTAVL.

He m u s t be saved—cost what it will!

NILS STENSSON.

[*Seizes her hand.*] Oh, I knew it;—you are noble and good!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

But how? Since we cannot hide him——

NILS STENSSON.

Ah, I have it! I have it! The secret——!

LADY INGER.

The secret?

NILS STENSSON.

Even so; yours and mine!

LADY INGER.

Merciful Heaven—you know it?

NILS STENSSON.

From first to last. And now when 'tis life or death—Where is Nils Lykke?

LADY INGER.

Fled.

NILS STENSSON.

Fled? Then God help me; for he alone can unseal my lips.—But what is a promise against a life! When the Swedish captain comes——.

LADY INGER.

What then? What will you do?

NILS STENSSON.

Purchase life and freedom;—tell him all.

LADY INGER.

Oh no, no;—be merciful!

NILS STENSSON.

Nought else can save me. When I have told him what I know——

LADY INGER.

[*Looks at him with suppressed agitation.*] You will be safe?

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, safe! Nils Lykke will speak for me. You see, 'tis the last resource.

LADY INGER.

[*Composedly, with emphasis.*] The last resource? Right, right—the last resource all are free to try. [*Points to the left.*] See, meanwhile you can hide in there.

NILS STENSSON.

[*In a low voice.*] Trust me—you will never repent of this.

LADY INGER.

[*Half to herself.*] God grant that you speak the truth!

[NILS STENSSON *goes out hastily by the furthest door on the left.* OLAF SKAKTAVL *is following; but* LADY INGER *detains him.*

LADY INGER.

Did you understand his meaning?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

The dastard! He would betray your secret. He would sacrifice your son to save himself.

LADY INGER.

When life is at stake, he said, we must try the last resource.—'Tis well, Olaf Skaktavl,—let it be as he has said!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

What mean you?

LADY INGER.

Life against life! One of them must perish.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Ah—you would——?

LADY INGER.

If we close not the lips of him that is within ere he come to speech with the Swedish captain, then is my son lost to me. But if, on the other hand, he be swept from my path, when the time comes I can claim all his

rights for my own child. Then shall you see that Inger Ottisdaughter has metal in her yet. Of this be assured —you shall not have long to wait for the vengeance you have thirsted after for twenty years.—Hark! They are coming up the stairs! Olaf Skaktavl,—it lies with you whether to-morrow I shall be no more than a childless woman, or——

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

So be it! I have yet one sound hand left. [*Gives her his hand.*] Inger Gyldenlöve—your name shall not die out through me.

[*Follows* NILS STENSSON *into the inner room.*

LADY INGER.

[*Pale and trembling.*] But dare I——?

[*A noise is heard in the room; she rushes with a scream towards the door.*

No, no,—it must not be!

[*A heavy fall is heard within; she covers her ears with her hands and hurries back across the hall with a wild look. After a pause she takes her hands cautiously away, listens again, and says softly:*

Now it is over. All is still within——

Thou sawest it, God—I repented me! But Olaf Skaktavl was too swift of hand.

[OLAF SKAKTAVL *comes silently into the hall.*

LADY INGER.

[*After a pause, without looking at him.*] Is it done?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

You need fear him no more; he will betray no one.

LADY INGER.

[*As before.*] Then he is dumb?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Six inches of steel in his breast. I felled him with my left hand.

LADY INGER.

Ay, ay—the right was too good for such work.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

That is your affair;—the thought was yours.—And now to Sweden! Peace be with you meanwhile! When next we meet at Östråt, I shall bring another with me.

[*Goes out by the furthest door on the right.*

LADY INGER.

Blood on my hands. Then 'twas to come to that!—He begins to be dear-bought now.

[BIÖRN *comes in, with a number of Swedish* MEN-AT-ARMS, *by the first door on the right.*

ONE OF THE MEN-AT-ARMS.

Pardon, if you are the lady of the house——

LADY INGER.

Is it Count Sture ye seek?

THE MAN-AT-ARMS.

The same.

LADY INGER.

Then you are on the right track. The Count has sought refuge with me.

THE MAN-AT-ARMS.

Refuge? Pardon, my noble lady,—you have no power to harbour him; for——

LADY INGER.

That the Count himself has doubtless understood; and therefore he has—ay, look for yourselves—therefore he has taken his own life.

THE MAN-AT-ARMS.

His own life!

LADY INGER.

Look for yourselves, I say. You will find the corpse within there. And since he already stands before another judge, it is my prayer that he may be borne hence with all the honour that beseems his noble birth.—Biörn, you know my own coffin has stood ready this many a year in the secret chamber. [*To the* MEN-AT-ARMS.] I pray that in it you will bear Count Sture's body to Sweden.

THE MAN-AT-ARMS.

It shall be as you command. [*To one of the others.*] Haste with these tidings to Jens Bielke. He holds the road with the rest of the troop. We others must in and——

[*One of the* MEN-AT-ARMS *goes out to the right; the others go with* BIÖRN *into the room on the left.*

LADY INGER.

[*Moves about for a time in uneasy silence.*] If Count Sture had not taken such hurried leave of the world,

within a month he had hung on a gallows, or had lain for all his days in a dungeon. Had he been better served with such a lot?

Or else he had bought his life by betraying my child into the hands of my foes. Is it *I*, then, that have slain him? Does not even the wolf defend her cubs? Who dare condemn me for striking my claws into him that would have reft me of my flesh and blood?—It had to be. No mother but would have done even as I.

But 'tis no time for idle musings now. I must to work.

[*Sits down by the table on the left.*

I will write to all my friends throughout the land. They must rise as one man to support the great cause. A new king,—regent first, and then king—— [*Begins to write, but falls into thought, and says softly:*] Who will be chosen in the dead man's place?—A king's mother—? 'Tis a fair word. It has but one blemish—the hateful likeness to another word.—King's m o t h e r and—king's m u r d e r e r[1]—King's murderer—one that takes a king's life. King's mother—one that gives a king life. [*She rises.*

Well, then; I will make good what I have taken.—My son shall be a king!

[*She sits down again and begins writing, but pushes the paper away again, and leans back in her chair.*

There is ever an eerie feeling in a house where lies a corpse. 'Tis therefore my mood is so strange. [*Turns her head to one side as if speaking to some one.*] Not therefore? Why else should it be? [*Broodingly.*

Is there such a great gulf, then, between openly striking down a foe and slaying one thus? Knut Alfson had cleft many a brow with his sword; yet was his own as

[1] The words in the original are "Kongemoder" and "Kongemorder," a difference of one letter only.

peaceful as a child's. Why then do I ever see this—[*makes a motion as though striking with a knife*]—this stab in the heart—and the gush of red blood after? [*Rings, and goes on speaking while shifting about her papers.*] Hereafter I will have nought to do with such ugly sights. I will be at work both day and night. And in a month—in a month my son will be here— —

BIÖRN.

[*Entering.*] Did you strike the bell, my lady?

LADY INGER.

[*Writing.*] Bring more lights. See to it in future that there are many lights in the room.

[BIÖRN *goes out again to the left.*

LADY INGER.

[*After a pause, rises impetuously.*] No, no, no;—I cannot guide the pen to-night! My head is burning and throbbing—— [*Startled, listens.*] What is t h a t? Ah, they are screwing the lid on the coffin.

They told me when I was a child the story of Sir Aage,[1] who rose up and walked with his coffin on his back.—If h e in there bethought him one night to come with the coffin on his back, and thank me for the loan? [*Laughs quietly.*] H'm—what have we grown people to do with childish fancies? [*Vehemently.*] Nevertheless, such stories do no good! They give uneasy dreams. When my son is king, they shall be forbidden.

[*Paces up and down once or twice; then opens the window.*

[1] Pronounce *Oaghĕ*.

How long is it, commonly, ere a body begins to rot? All the rooms must be aired. 'Tis not wholesome here till that be done.

[BIÖRN *comes in with two lighted branch-candlesticks, which he places on the tables.*

LADY INGER.

[*Who has set to work at the papers again.*] It is well. See you forget not what I have said. Many lights on the table!

What are they about now in there?

BIÖRN.

They are still screwing down the coffin-lid.

LADY INGER.

[*Writing.*] Are they screwing it down t i g h t ?

BIÖRN.

As tight as need be.

LADY INGER.

Ay, ay—who can tell how tight it needs to be? Do you see that 'tis well done. [*Goes up to him with her hand full of papers, and says mysteriously:*] Biörn, you are an old man; but o n e counsel I will give you. Be on your guard against all men—both those that a r e dead and those that are still to die.—Now go in—go in and see to it that they screw the lid down tightly.

BIÖRN.

[*Softly, shaking his head.*] I cannot make her out.

[*Goes back again into the room on the left.*

LADY INGER.

[*Begins to seal a letter, but throws it down half-closed; walks up and down awhile, and then says vehemently:*] Were I a coward I had never done it—never to all eternity! Were I a coward, I had shrieked to myself: Refrain, while there is yet a shred of hope for the saving of thy soul!

[*Her eye falls on Sten Sture's picture; she turns to avoid seeing it, and says softly:*

He is laughing down at me as though he were alive! Pah!

[*Turns the picture to the wall without looking at it.*

Wherefore did you laugh? Was it because I did evil to your son? But the other,—is not he your son too? And he is m i n e as well; mark that!

[*Glances stealthily along the row of pictures.*

So wild as they are to-night, I have never seen them yet. Their eyes follow me wherever I may go. [*Stamps on the floor.*] I will not have it! I will have peace in my house! [*Begins to turn all the pictures to the wall.*] Ay, if it were the Holy Virgin herself— — Thinkest thou n o w is the time——? Why didst thou never hear my prayers, my burning prayers, that I might have my child again? Why? Because the monk of Wittenberg is right: There is no mediator between God and man!

[*She draws her breath heavily, and continues in ever-increasing distraction.*

'Tis well that I know what to think in such things. There was no one to see what was done in there. There is none to bear witness against me.

[*Suddenly stretches out her hands and whispers:*

My son! My beloved child! Come to me! Here I am!—Hush! I will tell you something: They hate me

up there—beyond the stars—because I bore you into the world. 'Twas their will that I should bear the Lord God's standard over all the land. But I went my own way. That is why I have had to suffer so much and so long.

BIÖRN.

[*Comes from the room on the left.*] My lady, I have to tell you— Christ save me—what is this?

LADY INGER.

[*Has climbed up into the high-seat by the right-hand wall.*] Hush! Hush! I am the King's mother. My son has been chosen king. The struggle was hard ere it came to this—for 'twas with the Almighty One himself I had to strive.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Comes in breathless from the right.*] He is saved! I have Jens Bielke's promise. Lady Inger,—know that——

LADY INGER.

Peace, I say! look how the people swarm.

[*A funeral hymn is heard from the room within.*

There comes the coronation train. What a throng! All men bow themselves before the King's mother. Ay, ay; has she not fought for her son—even till her hands grew red withal?—Where are my daughters? I see them not.

NILS LYKKE.

God's blood!—what has befallen here?

LADY INGER.

My daughters—my fair daughters! I have none any more. I had o n e left, and her I lost even as she was mounting her bridal bed. [*Whispers.*] In it lay Lucia dead. There was no room for two.

NILS LYKKE.

Ah—it has come to this! The Lord's vengeance is upon me.

LADY INGER.

Can you see him? Look, look! 'Tis the King. It is Inger Gyldenlöve's son! I know him by the crown and by Sten Sture's ring that he wears round his neck. Hark, what a joyful sound! He is coming! Soon will he be in my arms! Ha-ha!—who conquers, God or I?

[*The* MEN-AT-ARMS *come out with the coffin.*

LADY INGER.

[*Clutches at her head and shrieks.*] The corpse! [*Whispers.*] Pah! 'Tis a hideous dream.

[*Sinks back into the high-seat.*

JENS BIELKE.

[*Who has come in from the right, stops and cries in astonishment.*] Dead! Then after all——

ONE OF THE MEN-AT-ARMS.

'Twas he himself that——

JENS BIELKE.

[*With a look at* NILS LYKKE.] He himself——?

NILS LYKKE.

Hush!

LADY INGER.

[*Faintly, coming to herself.*] Ay, right;—now I remember all.

JENS BIELKE.

[*To the* MEN-AT-ARMS.] Set down the corpse. It is not Count Sture.

ONE OF THE MEN-AT-ARMS.

Your pardon, Captain;—this ring that he wore around his neck——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Seizes his arm.*] Be still!

LADY INGER.

[*Starts up.*] The ring? The ring!
[*Rushes up and snatches the ring from him.*
Sten Sture's ring! [*With a shriek.*] Oh God, oh God —my son! [*Throws herself down on the coffin.*

THE MEN-AT-ARMS.

Her son?

JENS BIELKE.

[*At the same time.*] Inger Gyldenlöve's son?

NILS LYKKE.

So is it.

JENS BIELKE.

But why did you not tell me——?

BIÖRN.

[*Trying to raise her up.*] Help! help! My lady—what ails you? what lack you?

LADY INGER.

[*In a faint voice, half raising herself.*] What lack I? One coffin more. A grave beside my child— —

[*Sinks again, senseless, on the coffin.* NILS LYKKE *goes hastily out to the right. General consternation among the rest.*

THE FEAST AT SOLHOUG

THE FEAST AT SOLHOUG

INTRODUCTION *

EXACTLY a year after the production of *Lady Inger of Östråt*—that is to say on the "Foundation Day" of the Bergen Theatre, January 2, 1856—*The Feast at Solhoug* was produced. The poet himself has written its history in full in the Preface to the second edition (see p. 196). The only comment that need be made upon his rejoinder to his critics has been made, with perfect fairness as it seems to me, by George Brandes in the following passage:[1] "No one who is unacquainted with the Scandinavian languages can fully understand the charm that the style and melody of the old ballads exercise upon the Scandinavian mind. The beautiful ballads and songs of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* have perhaps had a similar power over German minds; but, as far as I am aware, no German poet has ever succeeded in inventing a metre suitable for dramatic purposes, which yet retained the mediæval ballad's sonorous swing and rich aroma. The explanation of the powerful impression produced in its day by Henrik Hertz's *Svend Dyring's House* is to be found in the fact that in it, for the first time, the problem was solved of how to fashion a metre akin to that of the

[1] *Ibsen and Björnson.* London, Heinemann, 1899, p. 88.

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heroic ballads, a metre possessing as great mobility as the verse of the *Niebelungenlied*, along with a dramatic value not inferior to that of the iambic pentameter. Henrik Ibsen, it is true, has justly pointed out that, as regards the mutual relations of the principal characters, *Svend Dyring's House* owes more to Kleist's *Käthchen von Heilbronn* than *The Feast at Solhoug* owes to *Svend Dyring's House*. But the fact remains that the versified parts of the dialogue of both *The Feast at Solhoug* and *Olaf Liliekrans* are written in that imitation of the tone and style of the heroic ballad, of which Hertz was the happily-inspired originator. There seems to me to be no depreciation whatever of Ibsen in the assertion of Hertz's right to rank as his model. Even the greatest must have learnt from some one."

The question is, to put it in a nutshell: Supposing Hertz had never adapted the ballad measures to dramatic purposes, would Ibsen have written *The Feast at Solhoug*, at any rate in its present form? I think we must answer: Almost certainly, no.

But while the influence of Danish lyrical romanticism is apparent in the style of the play, the structure, as it seems to me, shows no less clearly that influence of the French plot-manipulators which we found so unmistakably at work in *Lady Inger*. Despite its lyrical dialogue, *The Feast at Solhoug* has that crispness of dramatic action which marks the French plays of the period. It may indeed be called Scribe's *Bataille de Dames* writ tragic. Here, as in the *Bataille de Dames* (one of the earliest plays produced under Ibsen's supervision), we have the rivalry of an older and a younger woman for the

love of a man who is proscribed on an unjust accusation, and pursued by the emissaries of the royal power. One might even, though this would be forcing the point, find an analogy in the fact that the elder woman (in both plays a strong and determined character) has in Scribe's comedy a cowardly suitor, while in Ibsen's tragedy, or melodrama, she has a cowardly husband. In every other respect the plays are as dissimilar as possible; yet it seems to me far from unlikely that an unconscious reminiscence of the *Bataille de Dames* may have contributed to the shaping of *The Feast at Solhoug* in Ibsen's mind. But more significant than any resemblance of theme is the similarity of Ibsen's whole method to that of the French school—the way, for instance, in which misunderstandings are kept up through a careful avoidance of the use of proper names, and the way in which a cup of poison, prepared for one person, comes into the hands of another person, is, as a matter of fact, drunk by no one, but occasions the acutest agony to the would-be poisoner. All this ingenious dovetailing of incidents and working-up of misunderstandings Ibsen unquestionably learned from the French. The French language, indeed, is the only one which has a word—*quiproquo*—to indicate the class of misunderstanding which, from *Lady Inger* down to *The League of Youth*, Ibsen employed without scruple.

Ibsen's first visit to the home of his future wife took place five days after the production of *The Feast at Solhoug*. It seems doubtful whether this was actually his first meeting with her;[1] but at any rate we can scarcely

[1] See note, p. 12.

suppose that he knew her during the previous summer, when he was writing his play. It is a curious coincidence, then, that he should have found in Susanna Thoresen and her sister Marie very much the same contrast of characters which had occupied him in his first dramatic effort, *Catilina*, and which had formed the main subject of the play he had just produced. It is less wonderful that the same contrast should so often recur in his later works, even down to *John Gabriel Borkman*. Ibsen was greatly attached to his gentle and retiring sister-in-law, who died unmarried in 1874.

The Feast at Solhoug has been translated by Miss Morison and myself, only because no one else could be found to undertake the task. We have done our best; but neither of us lays claim to any great metrical skill, and the light movement of Ibsen's verse is often, if not always, rendered in a sadly halting fashion. It is, however, impossible to exaggerate the irregularity of the verse in the original, or its defiance of strict metrical law. The normal line is one of four accents; but when this is said, it is almost impossible to arrive at any further generalisation. There is a certain lilting melody in many passages, and the whole play has not unfairly been said to possess the charm of a northern summer night, in which the glimmer of twilight gives place only to the gleam of morning. But in the main (though much better than its successor, *Olaf Liliekrans*) it is the weakest thing that Ibsen admitted into the canon of his works. He wrote of it in 1870 as "a study which I now disown"; and had he continued in that frame of mind, the world would

scarcely have quarrelled with his judgment. At worst, then, my collaborator and I cannot be accused of marring a masterpiece; but for which assurance we should probably have shrunk from the attempt.

W. A.

THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

I WROTE *The Feast at Solhoug* in Bergen in the summer of 1855—that is to say, about twenty-eight years ago.

The play was acted for the first time on January 2, 1856, also at Bergen, as a gala performance on the anniversary of the foundation of the Norwegian Stage.

As I was then stage-manager of the Bergen Theatre, it was I myself who conducted the rehearsals of my play. It received an excellent, a remarkably sympathetic interpretation. Acted with pleasure and enthusiasm, it was received in the same spirit. The "Bergen emotionalism," which is said to have decided the result of the latest elections in those parts, ran high that evening in the crowded theatre. The performance ended with repeated calls for the author and for the actors. Later in the evening I was serenaded by the orchestra, accompanied by a great part of the audience. I almost think that I went so far as to make some kind of speech from my window; certain I am that I felt extremely happy.

A couple of months later, *The Feast at Solhoug* was played in Christiania. There also it was received by the public with much approbation, and the day after the first performance Björnson wrote a friendly, youthfully ardent

article on it in the *Morgenblad*. It was not a notice or criticism proper, but rather a free, fanciful improvisation on the play and the performance.

On this, however, followed the real criticism, written by the real critics.

How did a man in the Christiania of those days—by which I mean the years between 1850 and 1860, or thereabouts—become a real literary, and in particular dramatic, critic?

As a rule, the process was as follows: After some preparatory exercises in the columns of the *Samfundsblad*, and after having frequently listened to the discussions which went on in Treschow's café or at "Ingebret's" after the play, the future critic betook himself to Johan Dahl's bookshop and ordered from Copenhagen a copy of J. L. Heiberg's *Prose Works*, among which was to be found—so he had heard it said—an essay entitled *On the Vaudeville*. This essay was in due course read, ruminated on, and possibly to a certain extent understood. From Heiberg's writings the young man, moreover, learned of a controversy which that author had carried on in his day with Professor Oehlenschläger and with the Sorö poet, Hauch. And he was simultaneously made aware that J. L. Baggesen (the author of *Letters from the Dead*) had at a still earlier period made a similar attack on the great author who wrote both *Axel and Valborg* and *Hakon Jarl*.

A quantity of other information useful to a critic was to be extracted from these writings. From them one learned, for instance, that taste obliged a good critic to be scandalised by a hiatus. Did the young critical Jero-

nimuses of Christiania encounter such a monstrosity in any new verse, they were as certain as their prototype in Holberg to shout their "Hoity-toity! the world will not last till Easter!"

The origin of another peculiar characteristic of the criticism then prevalent in the Norwegian capital was long a puzzle to me. Every time a new author published a book or had a little play acted, our critics were in the habit of flying into an ungovernable passion and behaving as if the publication of the book or the performance of the play were a mortal insult to themselves and the newspapers in which they wrote. As already remarked, I puzzled long over this peculiarity. At last I got to the bottom of the matter. Whilst reading the Danish *Monthly Journal of Literature* I was struck by the fact that old State-Councillor Molbech was invariably seized with a fit of rage when a young author published a book or had a play acted in Copenhagen.

Thus, or in a manner closely resembling this, had the tribunal qualified itself, which now, in the daily press, summoned *The Feast at Solhoug* to the bar of criticism in Christiania. It was principally composed of young men who, as regards criticism, lived upon loans from various quarters. Their critical thoughts had long ago been thought and expressed by others; their opinions had long ere now been formulated elsewhere. Their æsthetic principles were borrowed; their critical method was borrowed; the polemical tactics they employed were borrowed in every particular, great and small. Their very frame of mind was borrowed. Borrowing, borrowing, here, there, and everywhere! The single original thing

about them was that they invariably made a wrong and unseasonable application of their borrowings.

It can surprise no one that this body, the members of which, as critics, supported themselves by borrowing, should have presupposed similar action on my part, as author. Two, possibly more than two, of the newspapers promptly discovered that I had borrowed this, that, and the other thing from Henrik Hertz's play, *Svend Dyring's House*.

This is a baseless and indefensible critical assertion. It is evidently to be ascribed to the fact that the metre of the ancient ballads is employed in both plays. But my tone is quite different from Hertz's; the language of my play has a different ring; a light summer breeze plays over the rhythm of my verse; over that of Hertz's brood the storms of autumn.

Nor, as regards the characters, the action, and the contents of the plays generally, is there any other or any greater resemblance between them than that which is a natural consequence of the derivation of the subjects of both from the narrow circle of ideas in which the ancient ballads move.

It might be maintained with quite as much, or even more, reason that Hertz in his *Svend Dyring's House* had borrowed, and that to no inconsiderable extent, from Heinrich von Kleist's *Käthchen von Heilbronn*, a play written at the beginning of this century. Käthchen's relation to Count Wetterstrahl is in all essentials the same as Ragnhild's to the knight, Stig Hvide. Like Ragnhild, Käthchen is compelled by a mysterious, inexplicable power to follow the man she loves wherever he goes,

to steal secretly after him, to lay herself down to sleep near him, to come back to him, as by some innate compulsion, however often she may be driven away. And other instances of supernatural interference are to be met with both in Kleist's and in Hertz's play.

But does any one doubt that it would be possible, with a little good- or a little ill-will, to discover among still older dramatic literature a play from which it could be maintained that Kleist had borrowed here and there in his *Käthchen von Heilbronn*? I, for my part, do not doubt it. But such suggestions of indebtedness are futile. What makes a work of art the spiritual property of its creator is the fact that he has imprinted on it the stamp of his own personality. Therefore I hold that, in spite of the above-mentioned points of resemblance, *Svend Dyring's House* is as incontestably and entirely an original work by Henrik Hertz as *Kathchen von Heilbronn* is an original work by Heinrich von Kleist.

I advance the same claim on my own behalf as regards *The Feast at Solhoug*, and I trust that, for the future, each of the three namesakes[1] will be permitted to keep, in its entirety, what rightfully belongs to him.

In writing of *The Feast at Solhoug* in connection with *Svend Dyring's House*, George Brandes expresses the opinion, not that the former play is founded upon any idea borrowed from the latter, but that it has been written under an influence exercised by the older author upon the younger. Brandes invariably criticises my work in such a friendly spirit that I have all reason to be obliged to him for this suggestion, as for so much else.

[1] Heinrich von Kleist, Henrik Hertz, Henrik Ibsen.

Nevertheless I must maintain that he, too, is in this instance mistaken. I have never specially admired Henrik Hertz as a dramatist. Hence it is impossible for me to believe that he should, unknown to myself, have been able to exercise any influence on my dramatic production.

As regards this point, and the matter in general, I might confine myself to referring those interested to the writings of Dr. Valfrid Vasenius, lecturer on Æsthetics at the University of Helsingfors. In the thesis which gained him his degree of Doctor of Philosophy, *Henrik Ibsen's Dramatic Poetry in its First Stage* (1879), and also in *Henrik Ibsen: The Portrait of a Skald* (Jos. Seligman & Co., Stockholm, 1882), Vasenius states and supports his views on the subject of the play at present in question, supplementing them in the latter work by what I told him, very briefly, when we were together at Munich three years ago.

But, to prevent all misconception, I will now myself give a short account of the origin of *The Feast at Solhoug*.

I began this Preface with the statement that *The Feast at Solhoug* was written in the summer of 1855.

In 1854 I had written *Lady Inger of Östråt*. This was a task which had obliged me to devote much attention to the literature and history of Norway during the Middle Ages, especially the latter part of that period. I did my utmost to familiarise myself with the manners and customs, with the emotions, thoughts, and language, of the men of those days.

The period, however, is not one over which the student is tempted to linger, nor does it present much material suitable for dramatic treatment.

Consequently I soon deserted it for the Saga period. But the Sagas of the Kings, and in general the more strictly historical traditions of that far-off age, did not attract me greatly; at that time I was unable to put the quarrels between kings and chieftains, parties and clans, to any dramatic purpose. This was to happen later.

In the Icelandic "family" Sagas, on the other hand, I found in abundance what I required in the shape of human garb for the moods, conceptions, and thoughts which at that time occupied me, or were, at least, more or less distinctly present in my mind. With these Old-Norse contributions to the personal history of our Saga period I had had no previous acquaintance; I had hardly so much as heard them named. But now N. M. Petersen's excellent translation—excellent, at least, as far as the style is concerned—fell into my hands. In the pages of these family chronicles, with their variety of scenes and of relations between man and man, between woman and woman, in short, between human being and human being, there met me a personal, eventful, really living life; and as the result of my intercourse with all these distinctly individual men and women, there presented themselves to my mind's eye the first rough, indistinct outlines of *The Vikings at Helgeland.*

How far the details of that drama then took shape, I am no longer able to say. But I remember perfectly that the two figures of which I first caught sight were the two women who in course of time became Hiördis and Dagny. There was to be a great banquet in the play, with passion-rousing, fateful quarrels during its course. Of other characters and passions, and situations

produced by these, I meant to include whatever seemed to me most typical of the life which the Sagas reveal. In short, it was my intention to reproduce dramatically exactly what the Saga of the Volsungs gives in epic form.

I made no complete, connected plan at that time; but it was evident to me that such a drama was to be my first undertaking.

Various obstacles intervened. Most of them were of a personal nature, and these were probably the most decisive; but it undoubtedly had its significance that I happened just at this time to make a careful study of Landstad's collection of Norwegian ballads, published two years previously. My mood of the moment was more in harmony with the literary romanticism of the Middle Ages than with the deeds of the Sagas, with poetical than with prose composition, with the word-melody of the ballad than with the characterisation of the Saga.

Thus it happened that the fermenting, formless design for the tragedy, *The Vikings at Helgeland*, transformed itself temporarily into the lyric drama, *The Feast at Solhoug*.

The two female characters, the foster-sisters Hiördis and Dagny, of the projected tragedy, became the sisters Margit and Signë of the completed lyric drama. The derivation of the latter pair from the two women of the Saga at once becomes apparent when attention is drawn to it. The relationship is unmistakable. The tragic hero, so far only vaguely outlined, Sigurd, the far-travelled Viking, the welcome guest at the courts of kings, became

the knight and minstrel, Gudmund Alfson, who has likewise been long absent in foreign lands, and has lived in the king's household. His attitude towards the two sisters was changed, to bring it into accordance with the change in time and circumstances; but the position of both sisters to him remained practically the same as that in the projected and afterwards completed tragedy. The fateful banquet, the presentation of which had seemed to me of the first importance in my original plan, became in the drama the scene upon which its personages made their appearance; it became the background against which the action stood out, and communicated to the picture as a whole the general tone at which I aimed. The ending of the play was, undoubtedly, softened and subdued into harmony with its character as drama, not tragedy; but orthodox æstheticians may still, perhaps, find it disputable whether, in this ending, a touch of pure tragedy has not been left behind, to testify to the origin of the drama.

Upon this subject, however, I shall not enter further at present. My object has simply been to maintain and prove that the play under consideration, like all my other dramatic works, is an inevitable outcome of the tenor of my life at a certain period. It had its origin within, and was not the result of any outward impression or influence

This, and no other, is the true account of the genesis of *The Feast at Solhoug.*

HENRIK IBSEN.

ROME, April, 1883.

THE FEAST AT SOLHOUG

(1856)

CHARACTERS

BENGT GAUTESON, *Master of Solhoug*
MARGIT, *his wife.*
SIGNË, *her sister.*
GUDMUND ALFSON, *their kinsman.*
KNUT GESLING, *the King's sheriff.*
ERIK OF HEGGË, *his friend.*
A HOUSE-CARL.
ANOTHER HOUSE-CARL.
THE KING'S ENVOY.
AN OLD MAN.
A MAIDEN.
GUESTS, BOTH MEN AND LADIES.
MEN OF KNUT GESLING'S TRAIN.
SERVING-MEN AND MAIDENS AT SOLHOUG.

The action passes at Solhoug in the Fourteenth Century.

[PRONUNCIATION OF NAMES: Gudmund=*Goodmoond.* The *g* in "Margit" and in "Gesling" is hard, as in "go," or, in "Gesling," it may be pronounced as *y*—"Yesling." The first *o* in "Solhoug" ought to have the sound of a very long "oo."]

THE FEAST AT SOLHOUG

PLAY IN THREE ACTS

ACT FIRST

A stately room, with doors in the back and to both sides. In front, on the right, a bay window with small round panes, set in lead, and near the window a table, on which is a quantity of feminine ornaments. Along the left wall, a longer table with silver goblets, beakers and drinking-horns. The door in the back leads out to a passage-way,[1] *through which can be seen a spacious fiord-landscape.*

BENGT GAUTESON, MARGIT, KNUT GESLING *and* ERIK OF HEGGË *are seated around the table on the left. In the background are* KNUT'S *followers, some seated, some standing; one or two flagons of ale are handed around among them. Far off are heard church bells, ringing to Mass.*

ERIK.

[*Rising at the table.*] In one word, now, what answer have you to make to my wooing on Knut Gesling's behalf?

[1] This no doubt means a sort of arcaded veranda running along the outer wall of the house.

BENGT.

[*Glancing uneasily towards his wife.*] Well, I—to me it seems— [*As she remains silent.*] H'm, Margit, let us first hear your thought in the matter.

MARGIT.

[*Rising.*] Sir Knut Gesling, I have long known all that Erik of Heggë has told of you. I know full well that you come of a lordly house; you are rich in gold and gear, and you stand in high favour with our royal master.

BENGT.

[*To* KNUT.] In high favour—so say I too.

MARGIT.

And doubtless my sister could choose her no doughtier mate—

BENGT.

None doughtier; that is what *I* say too.

MARGIT.

—if so be that you can win her to think kindly of you.

BENGT.

[*Anxiously, and half aside.*] Nay—nay, my dear wife—

KNUT.

[*Springing up.*] Stands it so, Dame Margit! You think that your sister—

BENGT.

[*Seeking to calm him.*] Nay, nay, Knut Gesling! Have patience, now. You must understand us aright.

MARGIT.

There is naught in my words to wound you. My sister knows you only by the songs that are made about you—and these songs sound but ill in gentle ears.

No peaceful home is your father's house.
With your lawless, reckless crew,
Day out, day in, must you hold carouse—
God help her who mates with you.
God help the maiden you lure or buy
With gold and with forests green—
Soon will her sore heart long to lie
Still in the grave, I ween.

ERIK.

Aye, aye—true enough—Knut Gesling lives not over-peaceably. But there will soon come a change in that, when he gets him a wife in his hall.

KNUT.

And this I would have you mark, Dame Margit: it may be a week since, I was at a feast at Heggë, at Erik's bidding, whom here you see. The ale was strong; and as the evening wore on I vowed a vow that Signë, your fair sister, should be my wife, and that before the year was out. Never shall it be said of Knut Gesling that he brake any vow. You can see, then, that you must e'en choose me for your sister's husband—be it with your will or against it.

MARGIT.

Ere t h a t may be, I must tell you plain,
You must rid yourself of your ravening train.
You must scour no longer with yell and shout
O'er the country-side in a galloping rout;
You must still the shudder that spreads around
When Knut Gesling is to a bride-ale bound.
Courteous must your mien be when a-feasting you ride;
Let your battle-axe hang at home at the chimney-side—
It ever sits loose in your hand, well you know,
When the mead has gone round and your brain is aglow.
From no man his rightful gear shall you wrest,
You shall harm no harmless maiden;
You shall send to no man the shameless hest
That when his path crosses yours, he were best
Come with his grave-clothes laden.
And if you will so bear you till the year be past,
You may win my sister for your bride at last.

KNUT.

[*With suppressed rage.*] You know how to order your words cunningly, Dame Margit. Truly, you should have been a priest, and not your husband's wife.

BENGT.

Oh, for that matter, I too could—

KNUT.

[*Paying no heed to him.*] But I would have you take note that had a sword-bearing man spoken to me in such wise—

BENGT.

Nay, but listen, Knut Gesling—you must understand us!

KNUT.

[*As before.*] Well, briefly, he should have learnt that the axe sits loose in my hand, as you said but now.

BENGT.

[*Softly.*] There we have it! Margit, Margit, this will never end well.

MARGIT.

[*To* KNUT.] You asked for a forthright answer, and that I have given you.

KNUT.

Well, well; I will not reckon too closely with you, Dame Margit. You have more wit than all the rest of us together. Here is my hand;—it may be there was somewhat of reason in the keen-edged words you spoke to me.

MARGIT.

This I like well; now are you already on the right way to amendment. Yet one word more—to-day we hold a feast at Solhoug.

KNUT.

A feast?

BENGT.

Yes, Knut Gesling: you must know that it is our wedding-day; this day three years ago made me Dame Margit's husband.

MARGIT.

[*Impatiently, interrupting.*] As I said, we hold a feast to-day. When Mass is over, and your other business done, I would have you ride hither again, and join in the banquet. Then you can learn to know my sister.

KNUT.

So be it, Dame Margit; I thank you. Yet 'twas not to go to Mass that I rode hither this morning. Your kinsman, Gudmund Alfson, was the cause of my coming.

MARGIT.

[*Starts.*] He! My kinsman? Where would you seek him?

KNUT.

His homestead lies behind the headland, on the other side of the fiord.

MARGIT.

But he himself is far away.

ERIK.

Be not so sure; he may be nearer than you think.

KNUT.

[*Whispers.*] Hold your peace!

MARGIT.

Nearer? What mean you?

KNUT.

Have you not heard, then, that Gudmund Alfson has come back to Norway? He came with the Chancellor Audun of Hegranes, who was sent to France to bring home our new Queen.

MARGIT.

True enough; but in these very days the King holds his wedding-feast in full state at Bergen, and there is Gudmund Alfson a guest.

BENGT.

And there could we too have been guests had my wife so willed it.

ERIK.

[*Aside to* KNUT.] Then Dame Margit knows not that—?

KNUT.

[*Aside.*] So it would seem; but keep your counsel. [*Aloud.*] Well, well, Dame Margit, I must go my way none the less, and see what may betide. At nightfall I will be here again.

MARGIT.

And then you must show whether you have power to bridle your unruly spirit.

BENGT.

Aye, mark you that.

MARGIT.

You must lay no hand on your axe—hear you, Knut Gesling?

BENGT.

Neither on your axe, nor on your knife, nor on any other weapon whatsoever.

MARGIT.

For then can you never hope to be one of our kindred!

BENGT.

Nay, that is our firm resolve.

KNUT.

[*To* MARGIT.] Have no fear.

BENGT.

And what we have firmly resolved stands fast.

KNUT.

That I like well, Sir Bengt Gauteson. I, too, say the same; and I have pledged myself at the feast-board to wed your kinswoman. You may be sure that my pledge, too, will stand fast.—God's peace till to-night!

[*He and* ERIK, *with their men, go out at the back.*

[BENGT *accompanies them to the door. The sound of the bells has in the meantime ceased.*

BENGT.

[*Returning.*] Methought he seemed to threaten us as he departed.

MARGIT.

[*Absently.*] Aye, so it seemed.

BENGT.

Knut Gesling is an ill man to fall out with. And, when I bethink me, we gave him overmany hard words. But come, let us not brood over that. To-day we must be merry, Margit!—as I trow we have both good reason to be.

MARGIT.

[*With a weary smile.*] Aye, surely, surely.

BENGT.

'Tis true I was no mere stripling when I courted you. But well I wot I was the richest man for many and many a mile. You were a fair maiden, and nobly born; but your dowry would have tempted no wooer.

MARGIT.

[*To herself.*] Yet was I then so rich.

BENGT.

What said you, my wife?

MARGIT.

Oh, nothing, nothing. [*Crosses to the right.*] I will deck me with pearls and rings. Is not to-night a time of rejoicing for me?

BENGT.

I am fain to hear you say it. Let me see that you deck you in your best attire, that our guests may say: Happy she who mated with Bengt Gauteson.—But now must I to the larder; there are many things to-day that must not be overlooked. [*He goes out to the left.*

MARGIT.

Sinks down on a chair by the table on the right.

'Twas well he departed. While here he remains
Meseems the blood freezes within my veins;
Meseems that a crushing might and cold
My heart in its clutches doth still enfold.

[*With tears she cannot repress.*

He is my husband! I am his wife!
How long, how long lasts a woman's life?
Sixty years, mayhap—God pity me
Who am not yet full twenty-three!

[*More calmly, after a short silence.*

Hard, so long in a gilded cage to pine;
Hard a hopeless prisoner's lot—and mine.

[*Absently fingering the ornaments on the table, and beginning to put them on.*

With rings, and with jewels, and all of my best
By his order myself I am decking—
But oh, if to-day were my burial-feast,
'Twere little that I'd be recking. [*Breaking off.*
But if thus I brood I must needs despair;
I know a song that can lighten care. [*She sings.*

The Hill-King to the sea did ride;
—Oh, sad are my days and dreary—
To woo a maiden to be his bride.
—I am waiting for thee, I am weary.—

The Hill-King rode to Sir Håkon's hold;
—Oh, sad are my days and dreary—
Little Kirsten sat combing her locks of gold.
—I am waiting for thee, I am weary.—

The Hill-King wedded the maiden fair;
—Oh, sad are my days and dreary—
A silvern girdle she ever must wear.
—I am waiting for thee, I am weary.—

The Hill-King wedded the lily-wand,
—Oh, sad are my days and dreary—
With fifteen gold rings on either hand.
—I am waiting for thee, I am weary.—

Three summers passed, and there passed full five;
—Oh, sad are my days and dreary—
In the hill little Kirsten was buried alive.
—I am waiting for thee, I am weary.—

Five summers passed, and there passed full nine;
—Oh, sad are my days and dreary—
Little Kirsten ne'er saw the glad sunshine.
—I am waiting for thee, I am weary.—

In the dale there are flowers and the birds' blithe song;
—Oh, sad are my days and dreary—
In the hill there is gold and the night is long
—I am waiting for thee, I am weary.—

[*She rises and crosses the room.*

How oft in the gloaming would Gudmund sing
This song in my father's hall.
There was somewhat in it—some strange, sad thing
That took my heart in thrall;
Though I scarce understood, I could ne'er forget—
And the words and the thoughts they haunt me yet.

[*Stops horror-struck.*

Rings of red gold! And a belt beside—!
'Twas with gold the Hill-King wedded his bride!

[*In despair; sinks down on a bench beside the table on the left.*

Woe! Woe! I myself am the Hill-King's wife!
And there cometh none to free me from the prison of my life.

[SIGNË, *radiant with gladness, comes running in from the back.*

SIGNË.

[*Calling.*] Margit, Margit,—he is coming!

MARGIT.

[*Starting up.*] Coming? Who is coming?

SIGNË.

Gudmund, our kinsman!

MARGIT.

Gudmund Alfson! Here! How can you think—?

SIGNË.

Oh, I am sure of it.

MARGIT.

[*Crosses to the right.*] Gudmund Alfson is at the wedding-feast in the King's hall; you know that as well as I.

SIGNË.

Maybe; but none the less I am sure it was he.

MARGIT.

Have you seen him?

SIGNË.

Oh, no, no; but I must tell you—

MARGIT.

Yes, haste you—tell on!

SIGNË.

'Twas early morn, and the church bells rang,
To Mass I was fain to ride;
The birds in the willows twittered and sang,
In the birch-groves far and wide.
All earth was glad in the clear, sweet day;
And from church it had well-nigh stayed me;
For still, as I rode down the shady way,
Each rosebud beguiled and delayed me.
Silently into the church I stole;
The priest at the altar was bending;
He chanted and read, and with awe in their soul,
The folk to God's word were attending.
Then a voice rang out o'er the fiord so blue;
And the carven angels, the whole church through,
Turned round, methought, to listen thereto.

MARGIT.

O Signë, say on! Tell me all, tell me all!

SIGNË.

'Twas as though a strange, irresistible call
Summoned me forth from the worshipping flock,
Over hill and dale, over mead and rock.
'Mid the silver birches I listening trod,

Moving as though in a dream;
Behind me stood empty the house of God;
Priest and people were lured by the magic, 'twould
seem,
Of the tones that still through the air did stream.
No sound they made; they were quiet as death;
To hearken the song-birds held their breath,
The lark dropped earthward, the cuckoo was still,
As the voice re-echoed from hill to hill.

MARGIT.

Go on.

SIGNË.

They crossed themselves, women and men;
[*Pressing her hands to her breast.*
But strange thoughts arose within me then;
For the heavenly song familiar grew:
Gudmund oft sang it to me and you—
Ofttimes has Gudmund carolled it,
And all he e'er sang in my heart is writ.

MARGIT.

And you think that it may be—?

SIGNË.

I know it is he!
I know it! I know it! You soon shall see!
[*Laughing.*
From far-off lands, at the last, in the end,
Each song-bird homewards his flight doth bend!
I am so happy—though why I scarce know—!
Margit, what say you? I'll quickly go

And take down his harp, that has hung so long
In there on the wall that 'tis rusted quite;
Its golden strings I will polish bright,
And tune them to ring and to sing with his song.

MARGIT.

[*Absently.*]

Do as you will—

SIGNË.

[*Reproachfully.*]

Nay, this is not right.

[*Embracing her.*

But when Gudmund comes will your heart grow light—
Light, as when I was a child, again.

MARGIT.

[*To herself.*]

So much has changed—ah, so much!—since then—

SIGNË.

Margit, you s h a l l be happy and gay!
Have you not serving-maids many, and thralls?
Costly robes hang in rows on your chamber walls;
How rich you are, none can say.
By day you can ride in the forest deep,
Chasing the hart and the hind;
By night in a lordly bower you can sleep,
On pillows of silk reclined.

MARGIT.

[*Looking towards the window.*]

And he comes to Solhoug! He, as a guest!

SIGNË.

What say you?

MARGIT.

[*Turning.*]

Naught.—Deck you out in your best.
That fortune which seemeth to you so bright
May await yourself.

SIGNË.

Margit, say what you mean!

MARGIT.

[*Stroking her hair.*]

I mean—nay, no more! 'Twill shortly be seen—;
I mean—should a wooer ride hither to-night—?

SIGNË.

A wooer? For whom?

MARGIT.

For you.

SIGNË.

[*Laughing.*]

For me?
That he'd ta'en the wrong road full soon he would see.

MARGIT.

What would you say if a valiant knight
Begged for your hand?

SIGNË.

That my heart was too light
To think upon suitors or choose a mate.

MARGIT.

But if he were mighty, and rich, and great?

SIGNË.

Oh, were he a king, did his palace hold
Stores of rich garments and ruddy gold,
'Twould ne'er set my heart desiring.
With you I am rich enough here, meseems,
With summer and sun and the murmuring streams,
And the birds in the branches quiring.
Dear sister mine—here shall my dwelling be;
And to give any wooer my hand in fee,
For that I am too busy, and my heart too full of glee!

[SIGNË *runs out to the left, singing.*

MARGIT.

[*After a pause.*] Gudmund Alfson coming hither! Hither—to Solhoug? No, no, it cannot be.—Signë heard him singing, she said! When I have heard the pine-trees moaning in the forest afar, when I have heard the waterfall thunder and the birds pipe their lure in the tree-tops, it has many a time seemed to me as though, through it all, the sound of Gudmund's songs came blended. And yet he was far from here.—Signë has deceived herself. Gudmund cannot be coming.

[BENGT *enters hastily from the back.*

BENGT.

[*Entering, calls loudly.*] An unlooked-for guest, my wife!

MARGIT.

What guest?

BENGT.

Your kinsman, Gudmund Alfson! [*Calls through the doorway on the right.*] Let the best guest-room be prepared—and that forthwith!

MARGIT.

Is he, then, already here?

BENGT.

[*Looking out through the passage-way.*] Nay, not yet; but he cannot be far off. [*Calls again to the right.*] The carved oak bed, with the dragon-heads! [*Advances to* MARGIT.] His shield-bearer brings a message of greeting from him; and he himself is close behind.

MARGIT.

His shield-bearer! Comes he hither with a shield-bearer?

BENGT.

Aye, by my faith he does. He has a shield-bearer and six armed men in his train. What would you? Gudmund Alfson is a far other man than he was when he set forth to seek his fortune. But I must ride forth and receive him. [*Calls out.*] The gilded saddle on my horse! And forget not the bridle with the serpents' heads! [*Looks out to the back.*] Ha, there he is already at the gate! Well, then, my staff—my silver-headed staff! Such a lordly knight—Heaven save us!—we must receive him with honour, with all seemly honour!

[*Goes hastily out to the back.*

MARGIT.

[*Brooding.*]

Alone he departed, a penniless swain;
With esquires and henchmen now comes he again.
What would he? Comes he, forsooth, to see
My bitter and gnawing misery?
Would he try how long, in my lot accurst,
I can writhe and moan, ere my heart-strings burst—
Thinks he that—? Ah, let him only try!
Full little joy shall he reap thereby.

[*She beckons through the doorway on the right. Three handmaidens enter.*

List, little maids, what I say to you:
Find me my silken mantle blue.
Go with me into my bower anon:
My richest of velvets and furs do on.
Two of you shall deck me in scarlet and vair,
The third shall wind pearl-strings into my hair.
All my jewels and gauds bear away with ye!

[*The handmaids go out to the left, taking the ornaments with them.*

Since Margit the Hill-King's bride must be,
Well! don we the queenly livery!

[*She goes out to the left.*

[BENGT *ushers in* GUDMUND ALFSON, *through the pent-house passage at the back.*

BENGT.

And now once more—welcome under Solhoug's roof, my wife's kinsman.

GUDMUND.

I thank you. And how goes it with her? She thrives well in every way, I make no doubt?

BENGT.

Aye, you may be sure she does. There is nothing she lacks. She has five handmaidens, no less, at her beck and call; a courser stands ready saddled in the stall when she lists to ride abroad. In one word, she has all that a noble lady can desire to make her happy in her lot.

GUDMUND.

And Margit—is she then happy?

BENGT.

God and all men would think that she must be; but, strange to say—

GUDMUND.

What mean you?

BENGT.

Well, believe it or not as you list, but it seems to me that Margit was merrier of heart in the days of her poverty, than since she became the lady of Solhoug.

GUDMUND.

[*To himself.*] I knew it; so it must be.

BENGT.

What say you, kinsman?

GUDMUND.

I say that I wonder greatly at what you tell me of your wife.

BENGT.

Aye, you may be sure I wonder at it too. On the faith and troth of an honest gentleman, 'tis beyond me to guess what more she can desire. I am about her all day long; and no one can say of me that I rule her harshly. All the cares of household and husbandry I have taken on myself; yet notwithstanding— Well, well, you were ever a merry heart; I doubt not you will bring sunshine with you. Hush! here comes Dame Margit! Let her not see that I—

[MARGIT *enters from the left, richly dressed.*

GUDMUND.

[*Going to meet her.*] Margit—my dear Margit!

MARGIT

[*Stops, and looks at him without recognition.*] Your pardon, Sir Knight; but—? [*As though she only now recognised him.*] Surely, if I mistake not, 'tis Gudmund Alfson. [*Holding out her hand to him.*

GUDMUND.

[*Without taking it.*] And you did not at once know me again?

BENGT.

[*Laughing.*] Why, Margit, of what are you thinking? I told you but a moment agone that your kinsman—

MARGIT.

[*Crossing to the table on the right.*] Twelve years is a long time, Gudmund. The freshest plant may wither ten times over in that space.

GUDMUND.

'Tis seven years since last we met.

MARGIT.

Surely it must be more than that!

GUDMUND.

[*Looking at her.*] I could almost think so. But 'tis as I say.

MARGIT.

How strange! I must have been but a child then; and it seems to me a whole eternity since I was a child. [*Throws herself down on a chair.*] Well, sit you down, my kinsman! Rest you, for to-night you shall dance, and rejoice us with your singing. [*With a forced smile.*] Doubtless you know we are merry here to-day—we are holding a feast.

GUDMUND.

'Twas told me as I entered your homestead.

BENGT.

Aye, 'tis three years to-day since I became—

MARGIT.

[*Interrupting.*] My kinsman has already heard it. [*To* GUDMUND.] Will you not lay aside your cloak?

GUDMUND.

I thank you, Dame Margit; but it seems to me cold here—colder than I had foreseen.

BENGT.

For my part, I am warm enough; but then I have a hundred things to do and to take order for. [*To* MARGIT.] Let not the time seem long to our guest while I am absent. You can talk together of the old days.

[*Going.*

MARGIT.

[*Hesitating.*] Are you going? Will you not rather—?

BENGT.

[*Laughing, to* GUDMUND, *as he comes forward again.*] See you well—Sir Bengt of Solhoug is the man to make the women fain of him. How short soe'er the space, my wife cannot abide to be without me. [*To* MARGIT, *caressing her.*] Content you; I shall soon be with you again. [*He goes out to the back.*

MARGIT.

[*To herself.*] Oh, torture, to have to endure it all.

[*A short silence.*

GUDMUND.

How goes it, I pray, with your sister dear?

MARGIT.

Right well, I thank you.

GUDMUND.

They said she was here
With you.

MARGIT.

She has been here ever since we—

[*Breaks off.*

She came, now three years since, to Solhoug with me.

[*After a pause.*

Ere long she'll be here, her friend to greet.

GUDMUND.

Well I mind me of Signë's nature sweet.
No guile she dreamed of, no evil knew.
When I call to remembrance her eyes so blue
I must think of the angels in heaven.
But of years there have passed no fewer than seven;
In that time much may have altered. Oh, say
If she, too, has changed so while I've been away?

MARGIT.

She too? Is it, pray, in the halls of kings
That you learn such courtly ways, Sir Knight?
To remind me thus of the change time brings—

GUDMUND.

Nay, Margit, my meaning you read aright!
You were kind to me, both, in those far-away years—
Your eyes, when we parted were wet with tears.
We swore like brother and sister still
To hold together in good hap or ill.
'Mid the other maids like a sun you shone,
Far, far and wide was your beauty known.
You are no less fair than you were, I wot;
But Solhoug's mistress, I see, has forgot
The penniless kinsman. So hard is your mind
That ever of old was gentle and kind.

MARGIT.

[*Choking back her tears.*]

Ave, of old—!

GUDMUND.

[*Looks compassionately at her, is silent for a little, then says in a subdued voice.*

Shall we do as your husband said?
Pass the time with talk of the dear old days?

MARGIT.

[*Vehemently.*]

No, no, not of them! [*More calmly.*
Their memory's dead.
My mind unwillingly backward strays.
Tell rather of what your life has been,
Of what in the wide world you've done and seen.
Adventures you've lacked not, well I ween—
In all the warmth and the space out yonder,
That heart and mind should be light, what wonder?

GUDMUND.

In the King's high hall I found not the joy
That I knew by my own poor hearth as a boy.

MARGIT.

[*Without looking at him.*]

While I, as at Solhoug each day flits past,
Thank Heaven that here has my lot been cast.

GUDMUND.

'Tis well if for this you can thankful be—

MARGIT.

[*Vehemently.*]

Why not? For am I not honoured and free?
Must not all folk here obey my hest?
Rule I not all things as seemeth me best?
Here I am first, with no second beside me;
And that, as you know, from of old satisfied me.
Did you think you would find me weary and sad?
Nay, my mind is at peace and my heart is glad.
You might, then, have spared your journey here
To Solhoug; 'twill profit you little, I fear.

GUDMUND.

What, mean you, Dame Margit?

MARGIT.

[*Rising.*]

I understand all—
I know why you come to my lonely hall.

GUDMUND.

And you welcome me not, though you know why I came?
[*Bowing, and about to go.*
God's peace and farewell, then, my noble dame!

MARGIT.

To have stayed in the royal hall, indeed,
Sir Knight, had better become your fame.

GUDMUND.

[*Stops.*]

In the royal hall? Do you scoff at my need?

MARGIT.

Your need? You are ill to content, my friend;
Where, I would know, do you think to end?
You can dress you in velvet and cramoisie,
You stand by the throne, and have lands in fee—

GUDMUND.

Do you deem, then, that fortune is kind to me?
You said but now that full well you knew
What brought me to Solhoug—

MARGIT.

I told you true!

GUDMUND.

Then you know what of late has befallen me;—
You have heard the tale of my outlawry?

MARGIT.

[*Terror-struck.*]

An outlaw! You, Gudmund!

GUDMUND.

I am indeed.
But I swear, by the Holy Christ I swear,
Had I known the thoughts of your heart, I ne'er
Had bent me to Solhoug in my need.
I thought that you still were gentle-hearted,
As you ever were wont to be ere we parted:
But I truckle not to you; the wood is wide,
My hand and my bow shall fend for me there;
I will drink of the mountain brook, and hide
My head in the wild beast's lair.

[*On the point of going.*

MARGIT.

[*Holding him back.*]

Outlawed! Nay, stay! I swear to you
That naught of your outlawry I knew.

GUDMUND.

It is as I tell you. My life's at stake;
And to live are all men fain.
Three nights like a dog 'neath the sky I've lain,
My couch on the hillside forced to make,
With for pillow the boulder grey.
Though too proud to knock at the door of the stranger,
And pray him for aid in the hour of danger,
Yet strong was my hope as I held on my way:
I thought: When to Solhoug you come at last
Then all your pains will be done and past.
You have sure friends there, whatever betide.—
But hope like a wayside flower shrivels up;
Though your husband met me with flagon and cup,
And his doors flung open wide,
Within, your dwelling seems chill and bare;
Dark is the hall; my friends are not there.
'Tis well; I will back to my hills from your halls.

MARGIT.

[*Beseechingly.*]

Oh, hear me!

GUDMUND.

My soul is not base as a thrall's.
Now life to me seems a thing of naught;
Truly I hold it scarce worth a thought.

You have killed all that I hold most dear;
Of my fairest hopes I follow the bier.
Farewell, then, Dame Margit!

MARGIT.

Nay, Gudmund, hear!
By all that is holy—!

GUDMUND.

Live on as before
Live on in honour and joyance—
Never shall Gudmund darken your door,
Never shall cause you 'noyance.

MARGIT.

Enough, enough. Your bitterness
You presently shall rue.
Had I known you outlawed, shelterless,
Hunted the country through—
Trust me, the day that brought you here
Would have seemed the fairest of many a year;
And a feast I had counted it indeed
When you turned to Solhoug for refuge in need!

GUDMUND.

What say you—? How shall I read your mind?

MARGIT.

[*Holding out her hand to him.*]

Read this: that at Solhoug dwell kinsfolk kind.

GUDMUND.

But you said of late—?

MARGIT.

To that pay no heed.
Or hear me, and understand indeed.
For me is life but a long, black night,
Nor sun, nor star for me shines bright.
I have sold my youth and my liberty,
And none from my bargain can set me free.
My heart's content I have bartered for gold,
With gilded chains I have fettered myself;
Trust me, it is but comfort cold
To the sorrowful soul, the pride of pelf.
How blithe was my childhood—how free from care!
Our house was lowly and scant our store;
But treasures of hope in my breast I bore.

GUDMUND.

[*Whose eyes have been fixed upon her.*]

E'en then you were growing to beauty rare.

MARGIT.

Mayhap; but the praises showered on me
Caused the wreck of my happiness—that I now see.
To far-off lands away you sailed;
But deep in my heart was graven each song
You had ever sung; and their glamour was strong;
With a mist of dreams my brow they veiled.
In them all the joys you had dwelt upon
That can find a home in the beating breast;
You had sung so oft of the lordly life
'Mid knights and ladies. And lo! anon
Came wooers a many from east and from west;
And so—I became Bengt Gauteson's wife.

GUDMUND.

Oh, Margit!

MARGIT.

The days that passed were but few
Ere with tears my folly I 'gan to rue.
To think, my kinsman and friend, on thee
Was all the comfort left to me.
How empty now seemed Solhoug's hall,
How hateful and drear its great rooms all!
Hither came many a knight and dame,
Came many a skald to sing my fame.
But never a one who could fathom aright
My spirit and all its yearning—
I shivered, as though in the Hill-King's might;
Yet my head throbbed, my blood was burning.

GUDMUND.

But your husband—?

MARGIT.

He never to me was dear.
'Twas his gold was my undoing.
When he spoke to me, aye, or e'en drew near,
My spirit writhed with ruing. [*Clasping her hands.*
And thus have I lived for three long years—
A life of sorrow, of unstanched tears!
Your coming was rumoured. You know full well
What pride deep down in my heart doth dwell.
I hid my anguish, I veiled my woe,
For you were the last that the truth must know.

GUDMUND.

[*Moved.*]

'Twas therefore, then, that you turned away—

MARGIT.

[*Not looking at him.*]

I thought you came at my woe to jeer.

GUDMUND.

Margit, how could you think—?

MARGIT.

Nay, nay,
There was reason enough for such a fear.
But thanks be to Heaven, that fear is gone;
And now no longer I stand alone;
My spirit now is as light and free
As a child's at play 'neath the greenwood tree.
[*With a sudden start of fear.*
Ah, where are my wits fled! How could I forget—?
Ye saints, I need sorely your succor yet!
An outlaw, you said—?

GUDMUND.

[*Smiling.*]

Nay, now I'm at home;
Hither the King's men scarce dare come.

MARGIT.

Your fall has been sudden. I pray you, tell
How you lost the King's favour.

GUDMUND.

'Twas thus it befell.
You know how I journeyed to France of late,
When the Chancellor, Audun of Hegranes,
Fared thither from Bergen, in royal state,
To lead home the King's bride, the fair Princess,

With her squires, and maidens, and ducats bright.
Sir Audun's a fair and a stately knight,
The Princess shone with a beauty rare—
Her eyes seemed full of a burning prayer.
They would oft talk alone and in whispers, the two—
Of what? That nobody guessed or knew.
There came a night when I leant at ease
Against the galley's railing;
My thoughts flew onward to Norway's leas,
With the milk-white seagulls sailing.
Two voices whispered behind my back;—
I turned—it was he and she;
I knew them well, though the night was black,
But they—they saw not me.
She gazed upon him with sorrowful eyes
And whispered: "Ah, if to southern skies
We could turn the vessel's prow,
And we were alone in the bark, we twain,
My heart, methinks, would find peace again,
Nor would fever burn my brow."
Sir Audun answers; and straight she replies,
In words so fierce, so bold;
Like glittering stars I can see her eyes;
She begged him— [*Breaking off.*
My blood ran cold.

MARGIT.

She begged—?

GUDMUND.

I arose, and they vanished apace;
All was silent, fore and aft;—
[*Producing a small phial.*
But this I found by their resting place.

MARGIT.

And that—?

GUDMUND.

[*Lowering his voice.*]

Holds a secret draught.
A drop of this in your enemy's cup
And his life will sicken and wither up.
No leechcraft helps 'gainst the deadly thing.

MARGIT.

And that—?

GUDMUND.

That draught was meant for the King.

MARGIT.

Great God!

GUDMUND.

[*Putting up the phial again.*]

That I found it was well for them all.
In three days more was our vovage ended;
Then I fled, by my faithful men attended.
For I knew right well, in the royal hall,
That Audun subtly would work my fall,—
Accusing me—

MARGIT.

Aye, but at Solhoug he
Cannot harm you. All as of old will be.

GUDMUND.

All? Nay, Margit—you then were free.

MARGIT.

You mean—?

GUDMUND.

I? Nay, I meant naught. My brain
Is wildered; but ah, I am blithe and fain
To be, as of old, with you sisters twain.
But tell me,—Signë—?

MARGIT.

[*Points smiling towards the door on the left.*]

She comes anon.
To greet her kinsman she needs must don
Her trinkets—a task that takes time, 'tis plain.

GUDMUND.

I must see—I must see if she knows me again.
[*He goes out to the left.*

MARGIT.

[*Following him with her eyes.*] How fair and manlike he is! [*With a sigh.*] There is little likeness 'twixt him and— [*Begins putting things in order on the table, but presently stops.*] "You then were free," he said. Yes, then! [*A short pause.*] 'Twas a strange tale, that of the Princess who— She held another dear, and then— Aye, those women of far-off lands— I have heard it before—they are not weak as we are; they do not fear to pass from thought to deed. [*Takes up a goblet which stands on the table.*] 'Twas in this beaker that Gudmund and I, when he went away, drank to his happy return. 'Tis well-nigh the only heirloom I brought

with me to Solhoug. [*Putting the goblet away in a cupboard.*] How soft is this summer day; and how light it is in here! So sweetly has the sun not shone for three long years.

[SIGNË, *and after her* GUDMUND, *enters from the left.*

SIGNË.

[*Runs laughing up to* MARGIT.]

Ha, ha, ha! He will not believe that 'tis I!

MARGIT.

[*Smiling, to* GUDMUND.]

You see: while in far-off lands you strayed,
She, too, has altered, the little maid.

GUDMUND.

Aye truly! But that she should be— Why,
'Tis a marvel in very deed.
[*Takes both* SIGNË'S *hands and looks at her.*
Yet, when I look in these eyes so blue,
The innocent child-mind I still can read—
Yes, Signë, I know that 'tis you!
I needs must laugh when I think how oft
I have thought of you perched on my shoulder aloft
As you used to ride. You were then a child;
Now you are a nixie, spell-weaving, wild.

SIGNË.

[*Threatening with her finger.*]

Beware! If the nixie's ire you awaken,
Soon in her nets you will find yourself taken.

GUDMUND.

[*To himself.*]

I am snared already, it seems to me.

SIGNË.

But, Gudmund, wait—you have still to see
How I've shielded your harp from the dust and the rust.
[*As she goes out to the left.*
You shall teach me all of your songs! You must!

GUDMUND.

[*Softly, as he follows her with his eyes.*]

She has flushed to the loveliest rose of May,
That was yet but a bud in the morning's ray.

SIGNË.

[*Returning with the harp.*]

Behold!

GUDMUND.

[*Taking it.*]

My harp! As bright as of yore!
[*Striking one or two chords.*
Still the old chords ring sweet and clear—
On the wall, untouched, thou shalt hang no more.

MARGIT.

[*Looking out at the back.*]

Our guests are coming.

SIGNË.

[*While* GUDMUND *preludes his song.*]

Hush—hush! Oh, hear!

GUDMUND.

[*Sings.*]

I roamed through the uplands so heavy of cheer;
The little birds quavered in bush and in brere;
The little birds quavered, around and above:
Wouldst know of the sowing and growing of love?

It grows like the oak tree through slow-rolling years;
'Tis nourished by dreams, and by songs, and by tears;
But swiftly 'tis sown; ere a moment speeds by,
Deep, deep in the heart love is rooted for aye.

[*As he strikes the concluding chords, he goes towards the back, where he lays down his harp.*

SIGNË.

[*Thoughtfully, repeats to herself.*]

But swiftly 'tis sown; ere a moment speeds by,
Deep, deep in the heart love is rooted for aye.

MARGIT.

[*Absently.*] Did you speak to me?—I heard not clearly—?

SIGNË.

I? No, no. I only meant—

[*She again becomes absorbed in dreams.*

MARGIT.

[*Half aloud; looking straight before her.*]

It grows like the oak tree through slow-rolling years;
'Tis nourished by dreams, and by songs and by tears.

SIGNË.

[*Returning to herself.*] You said that—?

MARGIT.

[*Drawing her hand over her brow.*] Nay, 'twas nothing. Come, we must go meet our guests.

[BENGT *enters with many* GUESTS, *both men and women, through the passage-way.*

GUESTS.

[*Sing.*]

With song and harping enter we
The feast-hall opened wide;
Peace to our hostess kind and free,
All happiness to her betide.
O'er Solhoug's roof for ever may
Bright as to-day
The heavens abide.

ACT SECOND

A birch grove adjoining the house, one corner of which is seen to the left. At the back, a footpath leads up the hillside. To the right of the footpath a river comes tumbling down a ravine and loses itself among boulders and stones. It is a light summer evening. The door leading to the house stands open; the windows are lighted up. Music is heard from within.

THE GUESTS.

[*Singing in the Feast Hall.*]

Set bow to fiddle! To sound of strings
We'll dance till night shall furl her wings,
Through the long hours glad and golden!
Like blood-red blossom the maiden glows—
Come, bold young wooer, and hold the rose
In a soft embrace enfolden.

[KNUT GESLING *and* ERIK OF HEGGË *enter from the house. Sounds of music, dancing and merriment are heard from within during what follows.*

ERIK.

If only you come not to repent it, Knut.

KNUT.

That is my affair.

ERIK.

Well, say what you will, 'tis a daring move. You are the King's Sheriff. Commands go forth to you that you shall seize the person of Gudmund Alfson, wherever you may find him. And now, when you have him in your grasp, you proffer him your friendship, and let him go freely, whithersoever he will.

KNUT.

I know what I am doing. I sought him in his own dwelling, but there he was not to be found. If, now, I went about to seize him here—think you that Dame Margit would be minded to give me Signë to wife?

ERIK.

[*With deliberation.*] No, by fair means it might scarcely be, but—

KNUT.

And by foul means I am loth to proceed. Moreover, Gudmund is my friend from bygone days; and he can be helpful to me. [*With decision.*] Therefore it shall be as I have said. This evening no one at Solhoug shall know that Gudmund Alfson is an outlaw;—to-morrow he must look to himself.

ERIK.

Aye, but the King's decree?

KNUT.

Oh, the King's decree! You know as well as I that the King's decree is but little heeded here in the uplands. Were the King's decree to be enforced, many a

stout fellow among us would have to pay dear both for bride-rape and for man-slaying. Come this way, I would fain know where Signë—? [*They go out to the right.*

[GUDMUND *and* SIGNË *come down the footpath at the back.*

SIGNË.

Oh, speak! Say on! For sweeter far
Such words than sweetest music are.

GUDMUND.

Signë, my flower, my lily fair!

SIGNË.

[*In subdued, but happy wonderment.*]

I am dear to him—I!

GUDMUND.

As none other I swear.

SIGNË.

And is it I that can bind your will!
And is it I that your heart can fill!
Oh, dare I believe you?

GUDMUND.

Indeed you may.
List to me, Signë! The years sped away,
But faithful was I in my thoughts to you,
My fairest flowers, ye sisters two.
My own heart I could not clearly read.
When I left, my Signë was but a child,
A fairy elf, like the creatures wild
Who play, while we sleep, in wood and mead.

But in Solhoug's hall to-day, right loud
My heart spake, and right clearly;
It told me that Margit's a lady proud,
Whilst you're the sweet maiden I love most dearly.

SIGNË.

[*Who has only half listened to his words.*]

I mind me, we sat in the hearth's red glow,
One winter evening—'tis long ago—
And you sang to me of the maiden fair
Whom the neckan had lured to his watery lair.
There she forgot both father and mother,
There she forgot both sister and brother;
Heaven and earth and her Christian speech,
And her God, she forgot them all and each.
But close by the strand a stripling stood
And he was heartsore and heavy of mood.
He struck from his harpstrings notes of woe,
That wide o'er the waters rang loud, rang low.
The spell-bound maid in the tarn so deep,
His strains awoke from her heavy sleep.
The neckan must grant her release from his rule,
She rose through the lilies afloat on the pool—
Then looked she to heaven while on green earth she trod,
And wakened once more to her faith and her God.

GUDMUND.

Signë, my fairest of flowers!

SIGNË.

It seems
That I, too, have lived in a world of dreams.
But the strange deep words you to-night have spoken,

Of the power of love, have my slumber broken.
The heavens seemed never so blue to me,
Never the world so fair;
I can understand, as I roam with thee,
The song of the birds in air.

GUDMUND.

So mighty is love—it stirs in the breast
Thoughts and longings and happy unrest.
But come, let us both to your sister go.

SIGNË.

Would you tell her—?

GUDMUND.

Everything she must know.

SIGNË.

Then go you alone;—I feel that my cheek
Would be hot with blushes to hear you speak.

GUDMUND.

So be it, I go.

SIGNË.

And here will I bide;
[*Listening towards the right.*
Or better—down by the riverside,
I hear Knut Gesling, with maidens and men.

GUDMUND.

There will you stay?

SIGNË.

Till you come again.

[*She goes out to the right.* GUDMUND *goes into the house.*

[MARGIT *enters from behind the house on the left.*

MARGIT.

In the hall there is gladness and revelry;
The dancers foot it with jest and glee.
The air weighed hot on my brow and breast;
For Gudmund, he was not there.

[*She draws a deep breath.*

Out here 'tis better: here's quiet and rest.
How sweet is the cool night air! [*A brooding silence.*
That horrible thought! Oh, why should it be
That wherever I go it follows me?
The phial—doth a secret draught contain;
A drop of this in my—enemy's cup,
And his life would sicken and wither up;
The leech's skill would be tried in vain.

[*Again a silence.*

Were I sure that Gudmund—held me dear—
Then little I'd care for—

[GUDMUND *enters from the house.*

GUDMUND.

You, Margit, here?
And alone? I have sought you everywhere.

MARGIT.

'Tis cool here. I sickened of heat and glare.
See you how yonder the white mists glide
Softly over the marshes wide?

Here it is neither dark nor light,
But midway between them— [*To herself.*
—as in my breast.
[*Looking at him.*
Is't not so—when you wander on such a night
You hear, though but half to yourself confessed,
A stirring of secret life through the hush,
In tree and in leaf, in flower and in rush?
[*With a sudden change of tone.*
Can you guess what I wish?

GUDMUND.

Well?

MARGIT.

That I could be
The nixie that haunts yonder upland lea.
How cunningly I should weave my spell!
Trust me—!

GUDMUND.

Margit, what ails you? Tell!

MARGIT.

[*Paying no heed to him.*]

How I should quaver my magic lay!
Quaver and croon it both night and day!
[*With growing vehemence.*
How I would lure the knight so bold
Through the greenwood glades to my mountain hold.
There were the world and its woes forgot
In the burning joys of our blissful lot.

GUDMUND.

Margit! Margit!

MARGIT.

[*Ever more wildly.*]

At midnight's hour
Sweet were our sleep in my lonely bower;—
And if death should come with the dawn, I trow
'Twere sweet to die so;—what thinkest thou?

GUDMUND.

You are sick!

MARGIT.

[*Bursting into laughter.*]

Ha, ha!—Let me laugh! 'Tis good
To laugh when the heart is in laughing mood!

GUDMUND.

I see that you still have the same wild soul
As of old—

MARGIT.

[*With sudden seriousness.*]

Nay, let not that vex your mind,
'Tis only at midnight it mocks control;
By day I am timid as any hind.
How tame I have grown, you yourself must say,
When you think on the women in lands far away—
Of that fair Princess—ah, s h e was wild!
Beside her lamblike am I and mild.
She did not helplessly yearn and brood,
She would have acted; and that—

GUDMUND.

'Tis good
You remind me; straightway I'll cast away
What to me is valueless after this day—
[*Takes out the phial.*

MARGIT.

The phial! You meant—?

GUDMUND.

I thought it might be
At need a friend that should set me free
Should the King's men chance to lay hands on me.
But from to-night it has lost its worth;
Now will I fight all the kings of earth,
Gather my kinsfolk and friends to the strife,
And battle right stoutly for freedom and life.
[*Is about to throw the phial against a rock.*

MARGIT.

[*Seizing his arm.*]

Nay, hold! Let me have it—

GUDMUND.

First tell me why?

MARGIT.

I'd fain fling it down to the neckan hard by,
Who so often has made my dull hours fleet
With his harping and songs, so strange and sweet.
Give it me! [*Takes the phial from his hand.*
There! [*Feigns to throw it into the river.*

GUDMUND.

[*Goes to the right, and looks down into the ravine.*]

Have you thrown it away?

MARGIT.

[*Concealing the phial.*]

Aye, surely! You saw—

[*Whispers as she goes towards the house.*

Now God help and spare me!
The ice must now either break or bear me! [*Aloud.*
Gudmund!

GUDMUND.

[*Approaching.*]

What would you?

MARGIT.

Teach me, I pray,
How to interpret the ancient lay
They sing of the church in the valley there:
A gentle knight and a lady fair,
They loved each other well.
That very day on her bier she lay
He on his sword-point fell.
They buried her by the northward spire,
And him by the south kirk wall;
And theretofore grew neither bush nor briar
In the hallowed ground at all.
But next spring from their coffins twain
Two lilies fair upgrew—
And by and by, o'er the roof-tree high,
They twined and they bloomed the whole year through.
How read you the riddle?

GUDMUND.

[*Looks searchingly at her.*]

I scarce can say.

MARGIT.

You may doubtless read it in many a way;
But its truest meaning, methinks, is clear:
The church can never sever two that hold each other dear.

GUDMUND.

[*To himself.*]

Ye saints, if she should—? Lest worse befall,
'Tis time indeed I told her all! [*Aloud.*
Do you wish for my happiness—Margit, tell!

MARGIT.

[*In joyful agitation.*]

Wish for it! I!

GUDMUND.

Then, wot you well,
The joy of my life now rests with you—

MARGIT.

[*With an outburst.*]

Gudmund!

GUDMUND.

Listen! 'tis time you knew—

[*He stops suddenly.*

[*Voices and laughter are heard by the river bank.* SIGNÉ *and some other* GIRLS *enter from the right, accompanied by* KNUT, ERIK *and several* YOUNGER MEN.

KNUT.

[*Still at a distance.*] Gudmund Alfson! Wait; I must speak a word with you.

[*He stops, talking to* ERIK. *The other* GUESTS *in the meantime enter the house.*

MARGIT.

[*To herself.*] The joy of his life—! What else can he mean but—! [*Half aloud.*] Signë—my dear, dear sister!

[*She puts her arm round* SIGNË'S *waist, and they go towards the back talking to each other.*

GUDMUND.

[*Softly, as he follows them with his eyes.*] Aye, so it were wisest. Both Signë and I must away from Solhoug. Knut Gesling has shown himself my friend; he will help me.

KNUT.

[*Softly, to* ERIK.] Yes, yes, I say, Gudmund is her kinsman; he can best plead my cause.

ERIK.

Well, as you will. [*He goes into the house.*

KNUT.

[*Approaching.*] Listen, Gudmund—

GUDMUND.

[*Smiling.*] Come you to tell me that you dare no longer let me go free.

KNUT.

Dare! Be at your ease as to that. Knut Gesling dares whatever he will. No, 'tis another matter. You know that here in the district, I am held to be a wild, unruly companion—

GUDMUND.

Aye, and if rumour lies not—

KNUT.

Why no, much that it reports may be true enough. But now, I must tell you—

[*They go, conversing, up towards the back.*

SIGNË.

[*To* MARGIT, *as they come forward beside the house.*] I understand you not. You speak as though an unlooked-for happiness had befallen you. What is in your mind?

MARGIT.

Signë—you are still a child; you know not what it means to have ever in your heart the dread of— [*Suddenly breaking off.*] Think, Signë, what it must be to wither and die without ever having lived.

SIGNË.

[*Looks at her in astonishment, and shakes her head.*] Nay, but, Margit—?

MARGIT.

Aye, aye, you do not understand, but none the less—

[*They go up again, talking to each other.* GUDMUND *and* KNUT *come down on the other side.*

GUDMUND.

Well, if so it be—if this wild life no longer contents you—then I will give you the best counsel that ever friend gave to friend: take to wife an honourable maiden.

KNUT.

Say you so? And if I now told you that 'tis even that I have in mind?

GUDMUND.

Good luck and happiness to you then, Knut Gesling! And now you must know that I too—

KNUT.

You? Are you, too, so purposed?

GUDMUND.

Aye, truly. But the King's wrath—I am a banished man—

KNUT.

Nay, to that you need give but little thought. As yet there is no one here, save Dame Margit, that knows aught of the matter; and so long as I am your friend, you have one in whom you can trust securely. Now I must tell you—

[*He proceeds in a whisper as they go up again.*

SIGNÉ.

[*As she and* MARGIT *again advance.*] But tell me then, Margit—!

MARGIT.

More I dare not tell you.

SIGNË.

Then will I be more open-hearted than you. But first answer me one question. [*Bashfully, with hesitation.*] Is there—is there no one who has told you anything concerning me?

MARGIT.

Concerning you? Nay, what should that be?

SIGNË.

[*As before, looking downwards.*] You said to me this morning: if a wooer came riding hither—?

MARGIT.

That is true. [*To herself.*] Knut Gesling—has he already—? [*Eagerly, to* SIGNE.] Well? What then?

SIGNË.

[*Softly, but with exultation.*] The wooer has come! He has come, Margit! I knew not then whom you meant; but now—!

MARGIT.

And what have you answered him?

SIGNË.

Oh, how should I know? [*Flinging her arms round her sister's neck.*] But the world seems to me so rich and beautiful since the moment when he told me that he held me dear.

MARGIT.

Why, Signë, Signë, I cannot understand that you should so quickly—! You scarce knew him before to-day.

SIGNË.

Oh, 'tis but little I yet know of love; but this I know that what the song says is true:

Full swiftly 'tis sown; ere a moment speeds by,
Deep, deep in the heart love is rooted for aye—

MARGIT.

So be it; and since so it is, I need no longer hold aught concealed from you. Ah—

[*She stops suddenly, as she sees* KNUT *and* GUDMUND *approaching.*

KNUT.

[*In a tone of satisfaction.*] Ha, this is as I would have it, Gudmund. Here is my hand!

MARGIT.

[*To herself.*] What is this?

GUDMUND.

[*To* KNUT.] And here is mine! [*They shake hands.*

KNUT.

But now we must each of us name who it is—

GUDMUND.

Good. Here at Solhoug, among so many fair women, I have found her whom—

KNUT.

I too. And I will bear her home this very night, if it be needful.

MARGIT.

[*Who has approached unobserved.*] All saints in heaven!

GUDMUND.

[*Nods to* KNUT.] The same is my intent!

SIGNË.

[*Who has also been listening.*] Gudmund!

GUDMUND AND KNUT.

[*Whispering to each other, as they both point at* SIGNË.] There she is!

GUDMUND.

[*Starting.*] Aye, mine.

KNUT.

[*Likewise.*] No, mine!

MARGIT.

[*Softly, half bewildered.*] Signë!

GUDMUND.

[*As before, to* KNUT.] What mean you by that?

KNUT.

I mean that 'tis Signë whom I—

GUDMUND.

Signë! Signë is my betrothed in the sight of God.

MARGIT.

[*With a cry.*] It was she! No—no!

GUDMUND.

[*To himself, as he catches sight of her.*] Margit! She has heard everything.

KNUT.

Ho, ho! So this is how it stands? Nay, Dame Margit, 'tis needless to put on such an air of wonder; now I understand everything.

MARGIT.

[*To* SIGNË.] But not a moment ago you said—? [*Suddenly grasping the situation.*] 'Twas Gudmund you meant!

SIGNË.

[*Astonished.*] Yes, did you not know it! But what ails you, Margit?

MARGIT.

[*In an almost toneless voice.*] Nay, nothing, nothing.

KNUT.

[*To* MARGIT.] And this morning, when you made me give my word that I would stir no strife here to-night—you already knew that Gudmund Alfson was coming. Ha, ha, think not that you can hoodwink Knut Gesling! Signë has become dear to me. Even this morning ' was but my hasty vow that drove me to seek her hand; but now—

SIGNË.

[*To* MARGIT.] He? Was this the wooer that was in your mind?

MARGIT.

Hush, hush!

KNUT.

[*Firmly and harshly.*] Dame Margit—you are her elder sister; you shall give me an answer.

MARGIT.

[*Battling with herself.*] Signë has already made her choice;—I have naught to answer.

KNUT.

Good; then I have nothing more to do at Solhoug. But after midnight—mark you this—the day is at an end; then you may chance to see me again, and then Fortune must decide whether it be Gudmund or I that shall bear Signë away from this house.

GUDMUND.

Aye, try if you dare; it shall cost you a bloody sconce.

SIGNË.

[*In terror.*] Gudmund! By all the saints—!

KNUT.

Gently, gently, Gudmund Alfson! Ere sunrise you shall be in my power. And she—your lady-love—
[*Goes up to the door, beckons and calls in a low voice.*]

Erik! Erik! come hither! we must away to our kinsfolk. [*Threateningly, while* ERIK *shows himself in the doorway.*] Woe upon you all when I come again!

[*He and* ERIK *go off to the left at the back.*

SIGNË.

[*Softly to* GUDMUND.] Oh, tell me, what does all this mean?

GUDMUND.

[*Whispering.*] We must both leave Solhoug this very night.

SIGNË.

God shield me—you would—!

GUDMUND.

Say naught of it! No word to any one, not even to your sister.

MARGIT.

[*To herself.*] She—it is she! She of whom he had scarce thought before to-night. Had I been free, I know well whom he had chosen.—Aye, free!

[BENGT *and* GUESTS, *both Men and Women, enter from the house.*

YOUNG MEN AND MAIDENS.

Out here, out here be the feast arrayed,
While the birds are asleep in the greenwood shade.
How sweet to sport in the flowery glade
'Neath the birches.

Out here, out here, shall be mirth and jest,
No sigh on the lips and no care in the breast,
When the fiddle is tuned at the dancers' 'hest,
'Neath the birches.

BENGT.

That is well, that is well! So I fain would see it! I am merry, and my wife likewise; and therefore I pray ye all to be merrry along with us.

ONE OF THE GUESTS.

Aye, now let us have a stave-match.[1]

MANY.

[*Shout.*] Yes, yes, a stave-match!

ANOTHER GUEST.

Nay, let that be; it leads but to strife at the feast. [*Lowering his voice.*] Bear in mind that Knut Gesling is with us to-night.

SEVERAL.

[*Whispering among themselves.*] Aye, aye, that is true. Remember the last time, how he—. Best beware.

AN OLD MAN.

But you, Dame Margit—I know your kin had ever wealth of tales in store; and you yourself, even as a child, knew many a fair legend.

[1] A contest in impromptu verse-making.

MARGIT.

Alas! I have forgot them all. But ask Gudmund Alfson, my kinsman; he knows a tale that is merry enough.

GUDMUND.

[*In a low voice, imploringly.*] Margit!

MARGIT.

Why, what a pitiful countenance you put on! Be merry, Gudmund! Be merry! Aye, aye, it comes easy to you, well I wot. [*Laughing, to the* GUESTS.] He has seen the huldra to-night. She would fain have tempted him; but Gudmund is a faithful swain. [*Turns again to* GUDMUND.] Aye, but the tale is not finished yet. When you bear away your lady-love, over hill and through forest, be sure you turn not round; be sure you never look back—the huldra sits laughing behind every bush; and when all is done— [*In a low voice, coming close up to him*] —you will go no further than she will let you. [*She crosses to the right.*]

SIGNË.

Oh, God! Oh, God!

BENGT.

[*Going around among the* GUESTS *in high contentment.*] Ha, ha, ha! Dame Margit knows how to set the mirth afoot! When she takes it in hand, she does it much better than I.

GUDMUND.

[*To himself.*] She threatens! I must tear the last hope out of her breast; else will peace never come to

her mind. [*Turns to the* GUESTS.] I mind me of a little song. If it please you to hear it—

SEVERAL OF THE GUESTS.

Thanks, thanks, Gudmund Alfson!

[*They close around him, some sitting, others standing.* MARGIT *leans against a tree in front on the right.* SIGNÉ *stands on the left, near the house.*

GUDMUND.

[*Sings.*]

I rode into the wildwood,
I sailed across the sea,
But 'twas at home I wooed and won
A maiden fair and free.

It was the Queen of Elfland,
She waxed full wroth and grim:
Never, she swore, shall that maiden fair
Ride to the church with him.

Hear me, thou Queen of Elfland.
Vain, vain are threat and spell;
For naught can sunder two true hearts
That love each other well!

AN OLD MAN.

That is a right fair song. See how the young swains cast their glances thitherward! [*Pointing towards the* GIRLS.] Aye, aye, doubtless each has his own.

BENGT.

[*Making eyes at* MARGIT.] Yes, I have mine, that is sure enough. Ha, ha, ha!

MARGIT.

[*To herself, quivering.*] To have to suffer all this shame and scorn! No, no; now to essay the last remedy!

BENGT.

What ails you? Meseems you look so pale.

MARGIT.

'Twill soon pass over. [*Turns to the* GUESTS.] Did I say e'en now that I had forgotten all my tales? I bethink me now that I remember one.

BENGT.

Good, good, my wife! Come, let us hear it.

YOUNG GIRLS.

[*Urgently.*] Yes, tell it us, tell it us, Dame Margit!

MARGIT.

I almost fear that 'twill little please you; but that must be as it may.

GUDMUND.

[*To himself.*] Saints in heaven, surely she would not—!

MARGIT.

It was a fair and noble maid,
She dwelt in her father's hall;
Both linen and silk did she broider and braid,
Yet found in it solace small.
For she sat there alone in cheerless state,
Empty were hall and bower;

In the pride of her heart, she was fain to mate
With a chieftain of pelf and power.
But now 'twas the Hill-King, he rode from the north,
With his henchmen and his gold;
On the third day at night he in triumph fared forth,
Bearing h e r to his mountain hold.
Full many a summer she dwelt in the hill;
Out of beakers of gold she could drink at her will.
Oh, fair are the flowers of the valley, I trow,
But only in dreams can she gather them now!
'Twas a youth, right gentle and bold to boot,
Struck his harp with such magic might
That it rang to the mountain's inmost root,
Where she languished in the night.
The sound in her soul waked a wondrous mood—
Wide open the mountain-gates seemed to stand;
The peace of God lay over the land,
And she saw how it all was fair and good.
There had happened what never had happened before;
She had wakened to life as his harp-strings thrilled;
And her eyes were opened to all the store
Of treasure wherewith the good earth is filled.
For mark this well: it hath ever been found
That those who in caverns deep lie bound
Are lightly freed by the harp's glad sound.
He saw her prisoned, he heard her wail—
But he cast unheeding his harp aside,
Hoisted straightway his silken sail,
And sped away o'er the waters wide
To stranger strands with his new-found bride.
[*With ever-increasing passion.*
So fair was thy touch on the golden strings
That my breast heaves high and my spirit sings!
I must out, I must out to the sweet green leas!

I die in the Hill-King's fastnesses!
He mocks at my woe as he clasps his bride
And sails away o'er the waters wide! [*Shrieks.*

With me all is over; my hill-prison barred;
Unsunned is the day, and the night all unstarred.
[*She totters and, fainting, seeks to support herself against the trunk of a tree.*

SIGNË.

[*Weeping, has rushed up to her, and takes her in her arms.*] Margit! My sister!

GUDMUND.

[*At the same time supporting her.*] Help! Help! she is dying!

[BENGT *and the* GUESTS *flock round them with cries of alarm.*

ACT THIRD

The hall at Solhoug as before, but now in disorder after the feast. It is night still, but with a glimmer of approaching dawn in the room and over the landscape without.

BENGT *stands outside in the passage-way, with a beaker of ale in his hand. A party of* GUESTS *are in the act of leaving the house. In the room a* MAID-SERVANT *is restoring order.*

BENGT.

[*Calls to the departing* GUESTS.] God speed you, then, and bring you back ere long to Solhoug. Methinks you, like the rest, might have stayed and slept till morning. Well, well! Yet hold—I'll e'en go with you to the gate. I must drink your healths once more.

[*He goes out.*

GUESTS.

[*Sing in the distance.*]

Farewell, and God's blessing on one and all
Beneath this roof abiding!
The road must be faced. To the fiddler we call:
Tune up! Our cares deriding,
With dance and with song
We'll shorten the way so weary and long.
Right merrily off we go.

[*The song dies away in the distance.*

[MARGIT *enters the hall by the door on the right.*

MAID.

God save us, my lady, have you left your bed?

MARGIT.

I am well. Go you and sleep. Stay—tell me, are the guests all gone?

MAID.

No, not all; some wait till later in the day; ere now they are sleeping sound.

MARGIT.

And Gudmund Alfson—?

MAID.

He, too, is doubtless asleep. [*Points to the right.*] 'Tis some time since he went to his chamber—yonder, across the passage.

MARGIT.

Good; you may go. [*The* MAID *goes out to the left.*

[MARGIT *walks slowly across the hall, seats herself by the table on the right, and gazes out at the open window.*

MARGIT.

To-morrow, then, Gudmund will ride away
Out into the world so great and wide.
Alone with my husband here I must stay;
And well do I know what will then betide.
Like the broken branch and the trampled flower
I shall suffer and fade from hour to hour.

[*Short pause; she leans back in her chair.*

I once heard a tale of a child blind from birth,
Whose childhood was full of joy and mirth;
For the mother, with spells of magic might,
Wove for the dark eyes a world of light.
And the child looked forth with wonder and glee
Upon valley and hill, upon land and sea.
Then suddenly the witchcraft failed—
The child once more was in darkness pent;
Good-bye to games and merriment;
With longing vain the red cheeks paled.
And its wail of woe, as it pined away,
Was ceaseless, and sadder than words can say.—
Oh! like that child's my eyes were sealed,
To the light and the life of summer blind—
[*She springs up.*
But n o w—! And I in this cage confined!
No, now is the worth of my youth revealed!
Three years of life I on him have spent—
My husband—but were I longer content
This hapless, hopeless weird to dree,
Meek as a dove I needs must be.
I am wearied to death of petty brawls;
The stirring life of the great world calls.
I will follow Gudmund with shield and bow,
I will share his joys, I will soothe his woe,
Watch o'er him both by night and day.
All that behold shall envy the life
Of the valiant knight and Margit his wife.—
His wife! [*Wrings her hands.*
Oh God, what is this I say!
Forgive me, forgive me, and oh! let me feel
The peace that hath power both to soothe and to heal.
[*Walks back and forward, brooding silently.*
Signë, my sister—? How hateful 'twere

To steal her glad young life from her!
But who can tell? In very sooth
She may love him but with the light love of youth.
[*Again silence; she takes out the little phial, looks long at it and says under her breath:*
This phial—were I its powers to try—
My husband would sleep for ever and aye!
[*Horror-struck.*
No, no! To the river's depths with it straight!
[*In the act of throwing it out of the window, stops.*
And yet I could—'tis not yet too late.—
[*With an expression of mingled horror and rapture, whispers.*
With what a magic resistless might
Sin masters us in our own despite!
Doubly alluring methinks is the goal
I must reach through blood, with the wreck of my soul.
[BENGT, *with the empty beaker in his hand, comes in from the passage-way; his face is red; he staggers slightly.*

BENGT.

[*Flinging the beaker upon the table on the left.*] My faith, this has been a feast that will be the talk of the country. [*Sees* MARGIT.] Eh, are you there? You are well again. Good, good.

MARGIT.

[*Who in the meantime has concealed the phial.*] Is the door barred?

BENGT.

[*Seating himself at the table on the left.*] I have seen to everything. I went with the last guests as far as the

gates. But what became of Knut Gesling to-night?—Give me mead, Margit! I am thirsty. Fill this cup.

[MARGIT *fetches a flagon of mead from a cupboard, and fills the goblet which is on the table in front of him.*

MARGIT.

[*Crossing to the right with the flagon.*] You asked about Knut Gesling.

BENGT.

That I did. The boaster, the braggart! I have not forgot his threats of yester-morning.

MARGIT.

He used worse words when he left to-night.

BENGT.

He did? So much the better. I will strike him dead.

MARGIT.

[*Smiling contemptuously.*] H'm—

BENGT.

I will kill him, I say! I fear not to face ten such fellows as he. In the store-house hangs my grandfather's axe; its shaft is inlaid with silver; with that axe in my hands, I tell you—! [*Thumps the table and drinks.*] To-morrow I shall arm myself, go forth with all my men, and slay Knut Gesling. [*Empties the beaker.*

MARGIT.

[*To herself.*] Oh, to have to live with him!

[*Is in the act of leaving the room.*

BENGT.

Margit, come here! Fill my cup again. [*She approaches; he tries to draw her down on to his knee.*] Ha, ha, ha! You are right fair, Margit! I love you well!

MARGIT.

[*Freeing herself.*] Let me go!

[*Crosses, with the goblet in her hand, to the left.*

BENGT.

You are not in the humour to-night. Ha, ha, ha! That means no great matter, I know.

MARGIT.

[*Softly, as she fills the goblet.*] Oh, that this might be the last beaker I should fill for you.

[*She leaves the goblet on the table and is making her way out to the left.*

BENGT

Hark to me, Margit. For one thing you may thank Heaven, and that is, that I made you my wife before Gudmund Alfson came back.

MARGIT.

[*Stops at the door.*] Why so?

BENGT.

Why, say you? Am I not ten times the richer man? And certain I am that he would have sought you for his wife, had you not been the mistress of Solhoug.

MARGIT.

[*Drawing nearer and glancing at the goblet.*] Say you so?

BENGT.

I could take my oath upon it. Bengt Gauteson has two sharp eyes in his head. But he may still have Signë.

MARGIT.

And you think he will—?

BENGT.

Take her? Ay, since he cannot have you. But had you been free,—then— Ha, ha, ha! Gudmund is like the rest. He envies me my wife. That is why I set such store by you, Margit. Here with the goblet again. And let it be full to the brim!

MARGIT.

[*Goes unwillingly across to the right.*] You shall have it straightway.

BENGT.

Knut Gesling is a suitor for Signë, too, but him I am resolved to slay. Gudmund is an honourable man; he shall have her. Think, Margit, what good days we shall have with them for neighbours. We will go a-visiting each other, and then will we sit the live-long day, each with his wife on his knee, drinking and talking of this and of that.

MARGIT.

[*Whose mental struggle is visibly becoming more severe, involuntarily takes out the phial as she says:*] No doubt, no doubt!

BENGT.

Ha, ha, ha! it may be that at first Gudmund will look askance at me when I take you in my arms; but that, I doubt not, he will soon get over.

MARGIT.

This is more than woman can bear! [*Pours the contents of the phial into the goblet, goes to the window and throws out the phial, then says, without looking at him.*] Your beaker is full.

BENGT.

Then bring it hither!

MARGIT.

[*Battling in an agony of indecision, at last says:*] I pray you drink no more to-night!

BENGT.

[*Leans back in his chair and laughs.*] Oho! You are impatient for my coming? Get you in; I will follow you soon.

MARGIT.

[*Suddenly decided.*] Your beaker is full. [*Points.*] There it is. [*She goes quickly out to the left.*

BENGT.

[*Rising.*] I like her well. It repents me not a whit that I took her to wife, though of heritage she owned no more than yonder goblet and the brooches of her wedding gown.

[*He goes to the table at the window and takes the goblet.*

[*A* HOUSE-CARL *enters hurriedly and with scared looks, from the back.*

HOUSE-CARL.

[*Calls.*] Sir Bengt, Sir Bengt! haste forth with all the speed you can! Knut Gesling with an armed train is drawing near the house.

BENGT.

[*Putting down the goblet.*] Knut Gesling? Who brings the tidings?

HOUSE-CARL.

Some of your guests espied him on the road beneath, and hastened back to warn you.

BENGT.

E'en so. Then will I—! Fetch me my grandfather's battle-axe!

[*He and the* HOUSE-CARL *go out at the back.*

[*Soon after,* GUDMUND *and* SIGNË *enter quietly and cautiously by the door on the right.*

SIGNË.

[*In muffled tones.*]

It must, then, be so!

GUDMUND.

[*Also softly.*]

Necessity's might
Constrains us.

SIGNË.

Oh! thus under cover of night
To steal from the valley where I was born!

[*Dries her eyes.*

Yet shalt thou hear no plaint forlorn.
'Tis for thy sake my home I flee;
Wert thou not outlawed, Gudmund dear,
I'd stay with my sister.

GUDMUND.

Only to be
Ta'en by Knut Gesling, with bow and spear,
Swung on the croup of his battle-horse,
And made his wife by force.

SIGNË.

Quick, let us flee. But whither go?

GUDMUND.

Down by the fiord a friend I know;
He'll find us a ship. O'er the salt sea foam
We'll sail away south to Denmark's bowers.
There waits you there a happy home;
Right joyously will fleet the hours;
The fairest of flowers they bloom in the shade
Of the beech-tree glade.

SIGNË.

[*Bursts into tears.*]

Farewell, my poor sister! Like mother tender
Thou hast guarded the ways my feet have trod,
Hast guided my footsteps, aye praying to God,
The Almighty, to be my defender.—
Gudmund—here is a goblet filled with mead;
Let us drink to her; let us wish that ere long
Her soul may again be calm and strong,
And that God may be good to her need.
[*She takes the goblet into her hands*

GUDMUND.

Aye, let us drain it, naming her name! [*Starts.*
Stop! [*Takes the goblet from her.*
For meseems it is the same—

SIGNË.

'Tis Margit's beaker.

GUDMUND.

[*Examining it carefully.*]

By Heaven, 'tis so!
I mind me still of the red wine's glow
As she drank from it on the day we parted
To our meeting again in health and glad-hearted.
To herself that draught betided woe.
No, Signë, ne'er drink wine or mead
From that goblet. [*Pours its contents out at the window.*
We must away with all speed.
[*Tumult and calls without, at the back.*

SIGNË.

List, Gudmund! Voices and trampling feet!

GUDMUND.

Knut Gesling's voice!

SIGNË.

O save us, Lord!

GUDMUND.

[*Places himself in front of her.*]

Nay, nay, fear nothing, Signë sweet—
I am here, and my good sword.
[MARGIT *comes in in haste from the left.*

MARGIT.

[*Listening to the noise.*] What means this? Is my husband—?

GUDMUND AND SIGNË.

Margit!

MARGIT.

[*Catches sight of them.*] Gudmund! And Signë! Are you here?

SIGNË.

[*Going towards her.*] Margit—dear sister!

MARGIT.

[*Appalled, having seen the goblet which* GUDMUND *still holds in his hand.*] The goblet! Who has drunk from it?

GUDMUND.

[*Confused.*] Drunk—? I and Signë—we meant—

MARGIT.

[*Screams.*] O God, have mercy! Help! Help! They will die!

GUDMUND.

[*Setting down the goblet.*] Margit—!

SIGNË.

What ails you, sister?

MARGIT.

[*Towards the back.*] Help, help! Will no one help?

[*A* HOUSE-CARL *rushes in from the passage-way.*

HOUSE-CARL.

[*Calls in a terrified voice.*] Lady Margit! Your husband—!

MARGIT.

He—has he, too, drunk—!

GUDMUND.

[*To himself.*] Ah! now I understand—

HOUSE-CARL.

Knut Gesling has slain him.

SIGNË.

Slain!

GUDMUND.

[*Drawing his sword.*] Not yet, I hope. [*Whispers to* MARGIT.] Fear not. No one has drunk from your goblet.

MARGIT.

Then thanks be to God, who has saved us all!

[*She sinks down on a chair to the left.* GUDMUND *hastens towards the door at the back.*

ANOTHER HOUSE-CARL.

[*Enters, stopping him.*] You come too late. Sir Bengt is dead.

GUDMUND.

Too late, then, too late.

HOUSE-CARL.

The guests and your men have prevailed against the murderous crew. Knut Gesling and his men are prisoners. Here they come.

[GUDMUND'S *men, and a number of* GUESTS *and* HOUSE-CARLS, *lead in* KNUT GESLING, ERIK OF HEGGË, *and several of* KNUT'S *men, bound.*

KNUT.

[*Who is pale, says in a low voice.*] Man-slayer, Gudmund. What say you to that?

GUDMUND.

Knut, Knut, what have you done?

ERIK.

'Twas a mischance, of that I can take my oath.

KNUT.

He ran at me swinging his axe; I meant but to defend myself, and struck the death-blow unawares.

ERIK.

Many here saw all that befell.

KNUT.

Lady Margit, crave what fine you will. I am ready to pay it.

MARGIT.

I crave naught. God will judge us all. Yet stay—one thing I require. Forgo your evil design upon my sister.

KNUT.

Never again shall I essay to redeem my baleful pledge. From this day onward I am a better man. Yet would I fain escape dishonourable punishment for my deed. [*To* GUDMUND.] Should you be restored to favour and place again, say a good word for me to the King!

GUDMUND.

I? Ere the sun sets, I must have left the country.
[*Astonishment amongst the* GUESTS. ERIK, *in whispers, explains the situation.*

MARGIT.

[*To* GUDMUND.] You go? And Signë with you?

SIGNË.

[*Beseechingly.*] Margit!

MARGIT.

Good fortune follow you both!

SIGNË.

[*Flinging her arms round* MARGIT'S *neck.*] Dear sister!

GUDMUND.

Margit, I thank you. And now farewell. [*Listening.*] Hush! I hear the tramp of hoofs in the court-yard.

SIGNË.

[*Apprehensively.*] Strangers have arrived.
[*A* HOUSE-CARL *appears in the doorway at the back.*

HOUSE-CARL.

The King's men are without. They seek Gudmund Alfson.

SIGNË.

Oh God!

MARGIT.

[*In great alarm.*] The King's men!

GUDMUND.

All is at an end, then. Oh Signë, to lose you now—could there be a harder fate?

KNUT.

Nay, Gudmund; sell your life dearly, man! Unbind us; we are ready to fight for you, one and all.

ERIK.

[*Looks out.*] 'Twould be in vain; they are too many for us.

SIGNË.

Here they come. Oh Gudmund, Gudmund!

[*The* KING'S MESSENGER *enters from the back, with his escort.*

MESSENGER.

In the King's name I seek you, Gudmund Alfson, and bring you his behests.

GUDMUND.

Be it so. Yet am I guiltless; I swear it by all that is holy!

MESSENGER.

We know it.

GUDMUND.

What say you? [*Agitation amongst those present.*

MESSENGER.

I am ordered to bid you as a guest to the King's house. His friendship is yours as it was before, and along with it he bestows on you rich fiefs.

GUDMUND.

Signë!

SIGNË.

Gudmund!

GUDMUND

But tell me—?

MESSENGER.

Your enemy, the Chancellor Audun Hugleikson, has fallen.

GUDMUND.

The Chancellor!

GUESTS.

[*To each other, in a half-whisper.*] Fallen!

MESSENGER.

Three days ago he was beheaded at Bergen. [*Lowering his voice.*] His offence was against Norway's Queen.

MARGIT.

[*Placing herself between* GUDMUND *and* SIGNË.]
Thus punishment treads on the heels of crime!
Protecting angels, loving and bright,
Have looked down in mercy on me to-night,
And come to my rescue while yet it was time.
Now know I that life's most precious treasure
Is nor worldly wealth nor earthly pleasure,
I have felt the remorse, the terror I know,
Of those who wantonly peril their soul,
To St. Sunniva's cloister forthwith I go.—
[*Before* GUDMUND *and* SIGNË *can speak.*
Nay: think not to move me or control.
[*Places* SIGNË'S *hand in* GUDMUND'S.
Take her then, Gudmund, and make her your bride.
Your union is holy; God's on your side.
[*Waving farewell, she goes towards the doorway on the left.* GUDMUND *and* SIGNË *follow her, she stops them with a motion of her hand, goes out, and shuts the door behind her. At this moment the sun rises and sheds its light into the hall.*

GUDMUND.

Signë—my wife! See, the morning glow!
'Tis the morning of our young love. Rejoice!

SIGNË.

All my fairest of dreams and of memories I owe
To the strains of thy harp and the sound of thy voice.
My noble minstrel, to joy or sadness
Tune thou that harp as seems thee best;
There are chords, believe me, within my breast
To answer to thine, or of woe or of gladness.

CHORUS OF MEN AND WOMEN.

Over earth keeps watch the eye of light,
Guardeth lovingly the good man's ways,
Sheddeth round him its consoling rays;—
Praise be to the Lord in heaven's height!

LOVE'S COMEDY

LOVE'S COMEDY

INTRODUCTION

Kærlighedens Komedie was published at Christiania in January, 1863. The polite world—so far as such a thing existed at that time in the Northern capital—received it with an outburst of indignation not now entirely easy to understand. It has indeed faults enough. The character-drawing is often crude, the action, though full of effective by-play, extremely slight, and the sensational climax has little relation to human nature as exhibited in Norway, or out of it, at that or any other time. But the sting lay in the unflattering veracity of the piece as a whole; in the merciless portrayal of the trivialities of persons, or classes, high in their own esteem; in the unexampled effrontery of bringing a clergyman upon the stage. All these have long since passed, in Scandinavia, into the category of the things which people take with their Ibsen as a matter of course, and the play is welcomed with delight by every Scandinavian audience. But in 1864 the matter was serious, and Ibsen meant it to be so.

For they were years of ferment—those six or seven which intervened between his return to Christiania from Bergen in 1857, and his departure for Italy in 1864. He was just entering on his intellectual prime. Ten years of chequered, and mostly stern, experience had only ma-

tured and deepened the uncompromising sincerity which had made the Grimstad apprentice an Ishmael in his little community; had only turned the uncomfortable boy, who tried to "waken Scandinavia" to the bitter need of Hungary in 1849, into the man who was presently to waken the civilised world to the yet more appalling veracities of Ghosts. The atmosphere of Christiania in the fifties was little calculated to assuage this temper, and Ibsen's position brought with it fresh elements of provocation. The newly founded "Norwegian Theatre," of which he had accepted the directorship, barely maintained itself, in the very capital of Norway, against the ascendancy of Danish taste and acting, enthroned then at the "Christiania" Theatre. A little band of 'nationalists' championed it valiantly in the press; but the solid phalanx of well-to-do and official society looked upon the nationalist movement, and especially upon the nationalist drama, as a provincial heresy; and the Norwegian Theatre, crippled for want of resources, found itself unable to stage just the plays which would most powerfully have vindicated the nationalist cause. Ibsen's own *Vikings in Helgeland*, in particular, rejected as too "Norwegian" by the Danish Theatre, was impracticable for his own. The finances of the theatre improved somewhat under Ibsen's management, but it finally became bankrupt, and his position was throughout one of discouragement and disillusion, added to the anxieties of a very slender income.

It is likely enough that this state of things did not render the director of the Norwegian Theatre less alive to the foibles of Christiania society. But the scathing ex-

posure of some of them in *Love's Comedy* sprang from a deeper root. Norse nationalism, in the patriotic sense, had absolutely no part in inspiring or provoking the play; Norse patriots, indeed, were to be among the loudest in decrying it. Ibsen himself, always more "Scandinavian" than Norwegian, was the least "Norse" of all his literary associates, and, keenly as he recognised the inadequacy of the Danish dramatic tradition, outgrew with extreme slowness his early taste for the classic elegance of Danish verse. As a student he had listened with delight to the lectures of Welhaven, the most Danish of Norwegian poets; Heiberg himself, the centre of Danish literary influence in Norway, and the director of the Christiania Theatre, he admired as a poet; and the summary rejection of the *Vikings* by the autocratic Dane did not prevent its author from commemorating him, upon his death three years later, in a noble dirge. But even apart from Ibsen, the soul of the nationalist movement in literature was something much more vital than a mere pitting of Norwegian against Danish idiosyncrasy. It was an attempt to vindicate for Scandinavian poetry the bold grasp of realities, the energetic application of ideas to life, the masculine and expressive beauty, which are the birthright of every fresh and original literature, and which the faded Romanticism of Denmark could no longer offer. Vinje and Botten-Hansen, Ibsen's closest literary associates, had drawn their literary sustenance less from the "Norse" coryphæus of the last generation, Wergeland, than from Heine and from Hegel. And both these influences left their mark on Ibsen himself. Heine's brilliant paradoxes appealed to a poet whose grip upon

reality was immeasurably firmer, but who habitually used truth to startle, not to persuade. And Hegel's conception of spiritual advance as a process in which self is slain in order that it may truly live, helped to define, if not to generate, Ibsen's profoundly characteristic doctrine that "nought abideth but the lost." The present drama, saturated with these influences, is more deeply tinctured with them than any of its successors. Falk, the young poet who dazzles and outrages the philistine world, is a palpably Heinesque figure; his lyric speech matches Heine's own in brilliance and in its daring descents to prose,—pointed out with disapproval at the outset by the pedant of Romanticism, Miss Jay. And the conviction which leads Falk and Svanhild to the far from "comic" climax of this Comedy of Love, that only by renunciation can Love survive, this Ibsenian philosophy of love, so strange, so repelling to most readers, was at least matured under the stimulus of Hegel. It was, from the vantage-ground —or the dizzy pinnacle—of this conception of love that Ibsen looked down upon the heterogeneous phenomena current in society under that name and upon the universal assumption that marriage was its natural and (for the respectable) only imaginable goal.

But at this point Ibsen's renunciatory idealism was met by, and taken over into, another current of thought, perhaps more fundamentally his own, and with which Hegel in any case had nothing to do, for it ran utterly counter to him. The spiritual ascetic who counselled lovers to save their love by losing it, was doubled with an almost fanatical individualist, for whom marriage, like every other form of social nexus, was full of snares

and pitfalls to the soul, which only cool and circumspect intelligence availed to avoid. Into the suburban drawing-rooms, accordingly, where the manufacture of happy pairs was so gaily and assiduously carried on, Ibsen prepared to fling his double paradox that marriage is the death of Love, and Love the ruin of marriage. An amazing, Protean thing this Ibsenian Love, which needs the agony of eternal separation to be completely itself, and yet at the touch of the routine of married life dribbles away; which triumphs over death and absence by the power of spiritual vision, and yet boggles and blunders purblind in the management of a home!

These ideas were already simmering in Ibsen's mind in 1858, a year after his arrival at Christiania. For the present, however, nothing came of them; his own happy marriage in the same year not improbably casting a little unphilosophical glamour over the state of married lovers.[1] But two years later he wrote four scenes of a comedy in prose, *Svanhild*, which presents nearly all the motives of the corresponding part of the complete play (the first forty pages of Act I.) in a compact and summary form. Once more the work was put by, and two years more passed before he again took it up. But then, in 1862, he threw himself upon it with exuberant energy, entirely rewrote the fragment, and carried it through with unflagging verve to the end. A French critic has called it "a lyric saturnalia," "a debauch of gaiety"; and if it is sometimes only his personages who are gay, not the poet, yet none of

[1] His wife however entered into his ideas; when the storm broke, after the publication of the play, she was, he afterwards wrote, the one person who approved it.

his plays gives us a more vivid sense of having been written with sustained delight.

The secret of this swift and effortless execution of the purpose he had so long dallied with lay in great part in his having found a thoroughly congenial form. In prose Ibsen was still laborious and uncertain; the masterly freedom he later achieved in it, but hardly before the *Pillars of Society*, was won slowly and at great cost. But in verse he was born free; it was the native language of his mind; in which he could "prance and curvet at will," as he once said to the present writer, like a rider on a horse that knows him. In verse all the exuberance of wit and poetry which his earlier prose thwarted, and his later sternly refused, had unstinted play. It was by their accomplished verse-craft, as has been said, that the Danish poets retained his admiration, even when, in *Peer Gynt*, he was ruthlessly shattering all the academic proprieties of their æsthetics. Prose had, nevertheless, been the predominant form of his drama since early in his Bergen time; he had designed it for this very play. In the *Feast at Solhoug* (1856) he had been beguiled back into verse, we can hardly doubt, by the charms of Hertz's Danish *Svend Dyring's House*. And his adoption of it here has been plausibly ascribed to the impression made upon him by a brilliant piece of contemporary criticism which he is known to have read, Möller's book *On French and Danish Comedy* (1858),—where the metrical and other excellencies of the latter are set in a very persuasive light.

The mere change from prose to verse thus brought with it a notable efflorescence of style. How the change told may be illustrated by a few lines from the first pas-

sage of arms between Falk and Guldstad,—the earlier part a moderate, the later an extreme example. In the *Svanhild* it takes this form:

Guld. As for the poetry of your song, let it be as it will: but there's a bad moral running through it. What sort of economy is it to let the sparrow eat the unripe fruit before it comes to anything? And then to let the cattle loose in the flower garden? A nice spectacle it would be next spring!

Falk. Next spring! If you really enjoy the spring, my friend, you will wish for no other spring than the one you are in.[1]

Compare this with Guldstad's speech (p. 314):

'As for your song, perhaps it's most poetic," etc.,

and with Falk's following tirade:

"Oh, next, next, next!" etc.

to

"And God knows if there's any resting then?"

A style so insistently vivacious as that of the later version was hardly an ideal medium for drama. But Ibsen, with all his joy in it, is its master, not its slave; he bends it to his purpose, and it becomes in his hands a singularly plastic medium of dramatic expression. The marble is too richly veined for ideal sculpture, but it takes the print of life. The wit, exuberant as it is, does not coruscate indiscriminately upon all lips; and it has many shades and varieties—caustic, ironical, imaginative, playful, pas-

[1] Ibsen, *Efterladte Skrifter*, I. 452. 3.

sionate—which take their temper from the speaker's mood.

But the development of the prose draft went far beyond style. Motives there just hinted are expanded into scenes, and the too closely packed dramatic ideas acquire their due value. The stoning of Svanhild's bird, instead of being told by her, is done before our eyes, and is, moreover, made dramatically expressive as Falk's symbolic vengeance for her supposed betrayal. The persons and their characters are substantially the same; but Stiver, the law clerk, replaces a journalist, and the personality of Svanhild, the heroine, is immensely strengthened and enriched. The prose Svanhild is little more than a pleasant *Backfisch*; when offended with Falk she will refuse to shake hands with him; but she is quite incapable of the powerful and subtle home thrusts by which the later Svanhild lays bare the weak places of her lover. Still less could we augur for her the lyrical exaltations of the climax. Yet here lay the essential moment of the whole action.

For, as will now be obvious, *Love's Comedy*, with all its exuberant wit and humour, is rooted in a view of life which is not "comic" at all. The laughter that rings through it is not the genial, tolerant laughter of the humourist, for whom the anomalies of life lie on the surface; it is the stern, implacable laughter of a Carlyle. His ridicule of ordinary love-making keeps, indeed, well within the bounds of ordinary comedy. The ceremonial formalities of the continental *Verlobung*, the shrill raptures of aunts and cousins over the engaged pair, the satisfied smile of enterprising mater-familias

as she reckons up the tale of daughters or of nieces safely married off under her auspices; or, again, the embarrassments incident to a prolonged *Brautstand* following a hasty wooing, the deadly effect of familiarity upon a shallow affection, and the anxious efforts to save the appearance of romance when its zest has departed—even the drastic picture of the Strawmans, Swiftian in its savagery, whose youthful fire has been converted into ashes and smoke by the preoccupations of a fruitful marriage,—all this required only a keen eye for absurdities, and does not touch the core of Ibsen's play. Camilla Collett, in her novel the *Official's Daughters* (1855), had ridiculed the same absurdities in the name of that very marriage for love which Ibsen repudiated. And these Stivers and Jays, these Linds and Annas, seem much less calculated to stand as examples of the fatuity of marrying for love, than as types of those who marry without understanding what love is at all. The problem of love, as Ibsen the poet and idealist saw it, is not involved in their mishaps. The gist of the action lies accordingly in the relations of the three central figures,—Falk, Svanhild, and Guldstad. All three, though full of dramatic individuality, convey different aspects of Ibsen's own thought. Falk, whose brilliant mockery pillories the victims of conventional love-making, himself contributes to the comedy by the fatuous egoism of his own first essay in love. He is a poet, and Ibsen, as so often elsewhere, ridicules in his creation foibles which he knew as passing impulses, or even as vanquished temptations, in himself. But as a poet he also represents Ibsen's poetic and idealist inspiration in all its phases,—passing

through the whole gamut from Benedick to Romeo, and finally to the purely Ibsenian super-Romeo who renounces in order to retain. As Falk applies his cautery to the company at large, Svanhild, with greater insight and at least equal spirit, applies hers to him. But she has nothing in common with the self-willed "emancipated" Rebekkas and Hildes of the future. She is rather the embodiment of all that Ibsen in these years understood by a high-souled girl's devotion in love. Her vision is as much finer and clearer than Falk's as her heart is richer; she convinces him of his weakness, and lifts him to the height of his strength. And the renunciation is harder by far for her. He is a poet, and the "song and sun" with which her love has filled him will evidently be no contemptible *quid pro quo* for its loss. But Svanhild's renunciation, rapturous as it is, is indeed her "last song." She lives in her memories, but she has buried her happiness. "Not at all!" exclaims a chorus of voices, Dr. Brandes's unhappily among them; "she subsides into the arms of Guldstad, who offers her a maintenance, a peaceful home, and ample means." And the same critics who quarrel with her renunciation as romantically unreal, denounce the act which clinches and completes it as "philistine" and prosaic. But Svanhild does not "console" herself with Guldstad. Doubtless, to have indignantly refused his hand would have been to her advantage with most readers. She makes the more complete surrender of a life devoted to unromantic duty. Having tasted the supreme poetry of life, she is ready to face its prose. She is, in short, Ibsen's Svanhild, true child of the poet of exalted idealism and of unflinching matter of fact. Guld-

stad, finally, represents exclusively this "unromantic" side of Ibsen. Like Antonio in Goethe's *Tasso*, he confronts, and finally checkmates, the brilliant wayward poet with the calm intelligence and strong sense of the experienced man of the world. And Guldstad is drawn with yet more marked sympathy and respect than Antonio. He expresses Ibsen's doctrine of marriage, as Falk and Svanhild his doctrine of love. When, therefore, their love, in defiance of both doctrines, is on the point of issuing in marriage, the formidable merchant faces them with the double weight of his experience and of their own past convictions, and becomes immediately master of the game. But there is no triumph in his success; he takes his prize with tender pity and sympathetic understanding; and if prose in his person prevails, with Ibsen's full concurrence, over poetry, it is prose conscious that it is but the second best course, a needful accommodation to the world of facts.

The present version of the play retains the metres of the original, and follows it in general line for line. For a long passage, occupying substantially the first twenty pages, the translator is indebted to the editor of the present work; and two other passages—Falk's tirades on pp. 366 and 408—result from a fusion of versions made independently by us both.

C. H. H.

LOVE'S COMEDY

PERSONS OF THE COMEDY

MRS. HALM, *widow of a government official.*
SVANHILD, ANNA, } *her daughters.*
FALK, *a young author,* LIND, *a divinity student,* } *her boarders.*
GULDSTAD, *a wholesale merchant.*
STIVER, *a law-clerk.*
MISS JAY, *his fiancée.*
STRAWMAN, *a country clergyman.*
MRS. STRAWMAN, *his wife.*
STUDENTS, GUESTS, MARRIED AND PLIGHTED PAIRS.
THE STRAWMANS' EIGHT LITTLE GIRLS.
FOUR AUNTS, A PORTER, DOMESTIC SERVANTS.

SCENE.—*Mrs. Halm's Villa on the Drammensvejen at Christiania.*

LOVE'S COMEDY

PLAY IN THREE ACTS

ACT FIRST

The SCENE *represents a pretty garden irregularly but tastefully laid out; in the background are seen the fjord and the islands. To the left is the house, with a verandah and an open dormer window above; to the right in the foreground an open summer-house with a table and benches. The landscape lies in bright afternoon sunshine. It is early summer; the fruit-trees are in flower.*

When the Curtain rises, MRS. HALM, ANNA, *and* MISS JAY *are sitting on the verandah, the first two engaged in embroidery, the last with a book. In the summer-house are seen* FALK, LIND, GULDSTAD, *and* STIVER: *a punch-bowl and glasses are on the table.* SVANHILD *sits alone in the background by the water.*

FALK.

[*Rises, lifts his glass, and sings.*]

Sun-glad day in garden shady
Was but made for thy delight:
What though promises of May-day
Be annulled by Autumn's blight?

Apple-blossom white and splendid
  Drapes thee in its glowing tent,—
Let it, then, when day is ended,
  Strew the closes storm-besprent.

CHORUS OF GENTLEMEN.

Let it, then, when day is ended, etc.

FALK.

Wherefore seek the harvest's guerdon
  While the tree is yet in bloom?
Wherefore drudge beneath the burden
  Of an unaccomplished doom?
Wherefore let the scarecrow clatter
  Day and night upon the tree?
Brothers mine, the sparrow's chatter
  Has a cheerier melody.

CHORUS.

Brothers mine, the sparrow's chatter, etc.

FALK.

Happy songster! Wherefore scare him
  From our blossom-laden bower?
Rather for his music spare him
  All our future, flower by flower;
Trust me, 'twill be cheaply buying
  Present song with future fruit;
List the proverb, "Time is flying;—"
  Soon our garden music's mute.

CHORUS.

List the proverb, etc.

FALK.

I will live in song and gladness,—
  Then, when every bloom is shed,
Sweep together, scarce in sadness,
  All that glory, wan and dead:
Fling the gates wide! Bruise and batter,
  Tear and trample, hoof and tusk;
I have plucked the flower, what matter
  Who devours the withered husk!

CHORUS.

I have plucked the flower, etc.

[*They clink and empty their glasses.*

FALK.

[*To the ladies.*]

There—that's the song you asked me for; but pray
Be lenient to it—I can't think to-day.

GULDSTAD.

Oh, never mind the sense—the sound's the thing.

MISS JAY.

[*Looking round.*]

But Svanhild, who was eagerest to hear—?
When Falk began, she suddenly took wing
And vanished—

ANNA.

[*Pointing towards the back.*]

No, for there she sits—I see her.

MRS. HALM.

[*Sighing.*]

That child! Heaven knows, she's past my comprehending!

MISS JAY.

But, Mr. Falk, I thought the lyric's ending
Was not so rich in—well, in poetry,
As others of the stanzas seemed to be.

STIVER.

Why, yes, and I am sure it could not tax
Your powers to get a little more inserted—

FALK.

[*Clinking glasses with him.*]

You cram it in, like putty into cracks.
Till lean is into streaky fat converted.

STIVER.

[*Unruffled.*]

Yes, nothing easier—I, too, in my day
Could do the trick.

GULDSTAD.

Dear me! Were you a poet?

MISS JAY.

My Stiver! Yes!

STIVER.

Oh, in a humble way.

MISS JAY.

[*To the ladies.*]

His nature is romantic.

MRS. HALM.

Yes, we know it.

STIVER.

Not now; it's ages since I turned a rhyme.

FALK.

Yes, varnish and romance go off with time.
But in the old days—?

STIVER.

Well, you see, 'twas when
I was in love.

FALK.

Is that time over, then?
Have you slept off the sweet intoxication?

STIVER.

I'm now e n g a g e d—I hold official station—
That's better than i n l o v e, I apprehend!

FALK.

Quite so! You're in the right, my good old friend.
The worst is past—*vous voilà bien avancé*—
Promoted from mere lover to *fiancé*.

STIVER.

[*With a smile of complacent recollection.*]

It's strange to think of it—upon my word,
I half suspect my memory of lying—
[*Turns to* FALK.
But seven years ago—it sounds absurd!—
I wasted office hours in versifying.

FALK.

What! Office hours—!

STIVER.

Yes, such were my transgressions.

GULDSTAD.

[*Ringing on his glass.*]

Silence for our solicitor's confessions!

STIVER.

But chiefly after five, when I was free,
I'd rattle off whole reams of poetry—
Ten—fifteen folios ere I went to bed—

FALK.

I see—you gave your Pegasus his head,
And off he tore—

STIVER.

On stamped or unstamped paper—
'Twas all the same to him—he'd prance and caper—

FALK.

The spring of poetry flowed no less flush?
But how, pray, did you teach it first to gush?

STIVER.

By aid of love's divining-rod, my friend!
Miss Jay it was that taught me where to bore,
My *fiancée*—she became so in the end—
For then she was—

FALK.

Your love and nothing more.

STIVER.

[*Continuing.*]

'Twas a strange time; I could not read a bit;
I tuned my pen instead of pointing it;
And when along the foolscap sheet it raced,
It twangled music to the words I traced;—
At last by letter I declared my flame
To her—to her—

FALK.

Whose *fiancé* you became.

STIVER.

In course of post her answer came to hand
The motion granted—judgment in my favour!

FALK.

And you felt bigger, as you wrote, and braver,
To find you'd brought your venture safe to land!

STIVER.

Of course

FALK.

And then you bade the Muse farewell?

STIVER.

I've felt no lyric impulse, truth to tell,
From that day forth. My vein appeared to peter
Entirely out; and now, if I essay
To turn a verse or two for New Year's Day,
I make the veriest hash of rhyme and metre,
And—I've no notion what the cause can be—
It turns to law and not to poetry.

GULDSTAD.

[*Clinks glasses with him.*]

And, trust me, you're no whit the worse for that!
[*To* FALK.
You think the stream of life is flowing solely
To bear you to the goal you're aiming at—
But you may find yourself mistaken wholly.
As for your song, perhaps it's most poetic,
Perhaps it's not—on that point we won't quarrel—
But here I lodge a protest energetic,
Say what you will, against its wretched moral.
A masterly economy and new
To let the birds play havoc at their pleasure
Among your fruit-trees, fruitless now for you,
And suffer flocks and herds to trample through
Your garden, and lay waste its springtide treasure!
A pretty prospect, truly, for next year!

FALK.

Oh, next, next, next! The thought I loathe and fear
That these four letters timidly express—
It beggars millionaires in happiness!
If I could be the autocrat of speech
But for one hour, that hateful word I'd banish;
I'd send it packing out of mortal reach,
As B and G from Knudsen's Grammar vanish.

STIVER.

Why should the word of hope enrage you thus?

FALK.

Because it darkens God's fair earth for us.
"Next year," "next love," "next life,"—my soul is vext
To see this world in thraldom to "the next."
'Tis this dull forethought, bent on future prizes,
That millionaires in gladness pauperises.
Far as the eye can reach, it blurs the age;
All rapture of the moment it destroys;
No one dares taste in peace life's simplest joys
Until he's struggled on another stage—
And there arriving, can he there repose?
No—to a new "next" off he flies again;
On, on, unresting, to the grave he goes;
And God knows if there's any resting then.

MISS JAY.

Fie, Mr. Falk, such sentiments are shocking.

ANNA.

[*Pensively.*]

Oh, I can understand the feeling quite;
I am sure at bottom Mr. Falk is right.

MISS JAY.

[*Perturbed.*]

My Stiver mustn't listen to his mocking.
He's rather too eccentric even now.—
My dear, I want you.

STIVER.

[*Occupied in cleaning his pipe.*]

Presently, my dear.

GULDSTAD.

[*To* FALK.]

One thing at least to me is very clear;—
And that is that you cannot but allow
Some forethought indispensable. For see,
Suppose that you to-day should write a sonnet,
And, scorning forethought, you should lavish on it
Your last reserve, your all, of poetry,
So that, to-morrow, when you set about
Your next song, you should find yourself cleaned out,
Heavens! how your friends the critics then would crow!

FALK.

D'you think they'd notice I was bankrupt? No!
Once beggared of ideas, I and they

Would saunter arm in arm the selfsame way—
[*Breaking off.*
But Lind! why, what's the matter with you, pray?
You sit there dumb and dreaming—I suspect you're
Deep in the mysteries of architecture.

LIND.

[*Collecting himself.*]

I? What should make you think so?

FALK.

I observe.
Your eyes are glued to the verandah yonder—
You're studying, mayhap, its arches' curve,
Or can it be its pillars' strength you ponder,
The door perhaps, with hammered iron hinges?
The window blinds, and their artistic fringes?
From something there your glances never wander.

LIND.

No, you are wrong—I'm just absorbed in being—
Drunk with the hour—naught craving, naught foreseeing.
I feel as though I stood, my life complete,
With all earth's riches scattered at my feet.
Thanks for your song of happiness and spring—
From out my inmost heart it seemed to spring.
[*Lifts his glass and exchanges a glance, unobserved, with* ANNA.
Here's to the blossom in its fragrant pride!
What reck we of the fruit of autumn-tide?
[*Empties his glass.*

FALK.

[*Looks at him with surprise and emotion, but assumes a light tone.*]

Behold, fair ladies! though you scorn me quite,
Here I have made an easy proselyte.
His hymn-book yesterday was all he cared for—
To-day e'en dithyrambics he's prepared for!
We poets must be born, cries every judge;
But prose-folks, now and then, like Strasburg geese,
Gorge themselves so inhumanly obese
On rhyming balderdash and rhythmic fudge,
That, when cleaned out, their very souls are thick
With lyric lard and greasy rhetoric. [*To* LIND.
Your praise, however, I shall not forget;
We'll sweep the lyre henceforward in duet.

MISS JAY.

You, Mr. Falk, are hard at work, no doubt,
Here in these rural solitudes delightful,
Where at your own sweet will you roam about—

MRS. HALM.

[*Smiling.*]

Oh, no, his laziness is something frightful.

MISS JAY.

What! here at Mrs. Halm's! that's most surprising—
Surely it's just the place for poetising—
[*Pointing to the right.*
That summer-house, for instance, in the wood
Sequestered, name me any place that could
Be more conducive to poetic mood—

FALK.

Let blindness veil the sunlight from mine eyes
I'll chant the splendour of the sunlit skies!
Just for a season let me beg or borrow
A great, a crushing, a stupendous sorrow,
And soon you'll hear my hymns of gladness rise!
But best, Miss Jay, to nerve my wings for flight,
Find me a maid to be my life, my light—
For that incitement long to Heaven I've pleaded;
But hitherto, worse luck, it hasn't heeded.

MISS JAY.

What levity!

MRS. HALM.

Yes, most irreverent!

FALK.

Pray don't imagine it was my intent
To live with her on bread and cheese and kisses.
No! just upon the threshold of our blisses,
Kind Heaven must snatch away the gift it lent.
I need a little spiritual gymnastic;
The dose in that form surely would be drastic.

SVANHILD

[*Has during the talk approached; she stands close to the table, and says in a determined but whimsical tone:*

I'll pray that such may be your destiny.
But, when it finds you—bear it like a man.

FALK.

[*Turning round in surprise.*]

Miss Svanhild!—well, I'll do the best I can.
But think you I may trust implicitly
To finding your petitions efficacious?
Heaven, as you know, to faith alone is gracious—
And though you've doubtless will enough for two
To make me bid my peace of mind adieu,
Have you the faith to carry matters through?
That is the question.

SVANHILD.

[*Half in jest.*]

Wait till sorrow comes,
And all your being's springtide chills and numbs,
Wait till it gnaws and rends you, soon and late,
Then tell me if my faith is adequate.

[*She goes across to the ladies.*

MRS. HALM.

[*Aside to her.*]

Can you two never be at peace? you've made
Poor Mr. Falk quite angry I'm afraid.

[*Continues reprovingly in a low voice.* MISS JAY *joins in the conversation.* SVANHILD *remains cold and silent.*

FALK.

[*After a pause of reflection goes over to the summer-house, then to himself.*]

With fullest confidence her glances lightened.
Shall I believe, as she does so securely,
That Heaven intends—

GULDSTAD.

No, hang it! don't be frightened!
The powers above would be demented surely
To give effect to orders such as these.
No, my good sir—the cure for your disease
Is exercise for muscle, nerve and sinew.
Don't lie there wasting all the grit that's in you
In idle dreams; cut wood, if that were all;
And then I'll say the devil's in't indeed
If one brief fortnight does not find you freed
From all your whimsies high-fantastical

FALK.

Fetter'd by choice, like Burnell's ass, I ponder—
The flesh on this side, and the spirit yonder.
Which were it wiser I should go for first?

GULDSTAD.

[*Filling the glasses.*]

First have some punch—that quenches ire and thirst.

MRS. HALM.

[*Looking at her watch.*]

Ha! Eight o'clock! my watch is either fast, or
It's just the time we may expect the Pastor.
[*Rises, and puts things in order on the verandah.*

FALK.

What! have we parsons coming?

MISS JAY.

Don't you know?

MRS. HALM.

I told you, just a little while ago—

ANNA.

No, mother—Mr. Falk had not yet come.

MRS. HALM.

Why no, that's true; but pray don't look so glum.
Trust me, you'll be enchanted with his visit.

FALK.

A clerical enchanter; pray who is it?

MRS. HALM.

Why, Pastor Strawman, not unknown to fame.

FALK.

Indeed! Oh, yes, I think I've heard his name,
And read that in the legislative game
He comes to take a hand, with voice and vote.

STIVER.

He speaks superbly.

GULDSTAD.

When he's cleared his throat.

MISS JAY.

He's coming with his wife—

MRS. HALM.

And all their blessings—

FALK.

To give them three or four days' treat, poor dears—
Soon he'll be buried over head and ears
In Swedish muddles and official messings—
I see!

MRS. HALM.

[*To* FALK.]

Now there's a man for you, in truth!

GULDSTAD.

They say he was a rogue, though, in his youth.

MISS JAY.

[*Offended.*]

There, Mr. Guldstad, I must break a lance!
I've heard as long as I can recollect,
Most worthy people speak with great respect
Of Pastor Strawman and his life's romance.

GULDSTAD.

[*Laughing.*]

Romance?

MISS JAY.

Romance! I call a match romantic
At which mere worldly wisdom looks askance.

FALK

You make my curiosity gigantic.

MISS JAY.

[*Continuing.*]

But certain people always grow splenetic—
Why, goodness knows—at everything pathetic,
And scoff it down. We all know how, of late,
An unfledged, upstart undergraduate
Presumed with brazen insolence, to declare
That "William Russell"[1] was a poor affair!

FALK.

But what has this to do with Strawman, pray?
Is he a poem, or a Christian play?

MISS JAY.

[*With tears of emotion.*]

No, Falk,—a man, with heart as large as day.
But when a—so to speak—mere lifeless thing
Can put such venom into envy's sting,
And stir up evil passions fierce and fell
Of such a depth—

FALK.

[*Sympathetically.*]

And such a length as well—

MISS JAY.

Why then, a man of your commanding brain
Can't fail to see—

FALK.

Oh, yes, that's very plain.
But hitherto I haven't quite made out
The nature, style, and plot of this romance.

[1] See Notes, page 483.

It's something quite delightful I've no doubt—
But just a little inkling in advance—

STIVER.

I will abstract, in rapid *résumé*,
The leading points.

MISS JAY.

No, I am more *au fait*,
I know the ins and outs—

MRS. HALM.

I know them too!

MISS JAY.

Oh Mrs. Halm! now let me tell it, do!
Well, Mr. Falk, you see—he passed at college
For quite a miracle of wit and knowledge,
Had admirable taste in books and dress—

MRS. HALM.

And acted—privately—with great success.

MISS JAY.

Yes, wait a bit—he painted, played and wrote—

MRS. HALM.

And don't forget his gift of anecdote

MISS JAY

Do give me time; I know the whole affair:
He made some verses, set them to an air,

Also his own,—and found a publisher.
O Heavens! with what romantic melancholy
He played and sang his "Madrigals to Molly"!

MRS. HALM.

He was a genius, that's the simple fact.

GULDSTAD.

[*To himself.*]

Hm! Some were of opinion he was cracked.

FALK.

A gray old stager,[1] whose sagacious head
Was never upon mouldy parchments fed,
Says "Love makes Petrarchs, just as many lambs
And little occupation, Abrahams."
But who was Molly?

MISS JAY.

Molly? His elect,
His lady-love, whom shortly we expect.
Of a great firm her father was a member—

GULDSTAD.

A timber house.

MISS JAY.

[*Curtly.*]

I'm really not aware.

GULDSTAD.

Did a large trade in scantlings, I remember.

[1] See Notes, page 483.

MISS JAY.

That is the trivial side of the affair.

FALK.

A firm?

MISS JAY.

[*Continuing.*]

Of vast resources, I'm informed.
You can imagine how the suitors swarm'd;
Gentlemen of the highest reputation.—

MRS. HALM.

Even a baronet made application.

MISS JAY.

But Molly was not to be made their catch.
She had met Strawman upon private stages;
To see him was to love him—

FALK.

And despatch
The wooing gentry home without their wages?

MRS. HALM.

Was it not just a too romantic match?

MISS JAY.

And then there was a terrible old father,
Whose sport was thrusting happy souls apart;
She had a guardian also, as I gather,
To add fresh torment to her tortured heart.

But each of them was loyal to his vow;
A straw-thatched cottage and a snow-white ewe
They dream'd of, just enough to nourish two—

MRS. HALM.

Or at the very uttermost a cow,—

MISS JAY.

In short, I've heard it from the lips of both,—
A beck, a byre, two bosoms, and one troth.

FALK.

Ah yes! And then—?

MISS JAY.

She broke with kin and class.

FALK.

She broke—?

MRS. HALM.

Broke with them.

FALK.

There's a plucky lass!

MISS JAY.

And fled to Strawman's garret—

FALK.

How? Without—
Ahem—the priestly consecration?

MISS JAY.

Shame!

MRS. HALM.

Fy, fy! my late beloved husband's name
Was on the list of sponsors—!

STIVER.

[*To* MISS JAY.]

You're to blame
For leaving that important item out.
In a report 'tis of the utmost weight
That the chronology be accurate.
But what I never yet could comprehend
Is how on earth they managed—

FALK.

The one room
Not housing sheep and cattle, I presume.

MISS JAY.

[*To* STIVER.]

O, but you must consider this, my friend;
There is no *Want* where Love's the guiding star;
All's right without if tender Troth's within.
[*To* FALK.
He loved her to the notes of the guitar,
And she gave lessons on the violin—

MRS. HALM.

Then all, of course, on credit they bespoke—

GULDSTAD.

Till, in a year, the timber merchant broke.

MRS. HALM.

Then Strawman had a call to north.

MISS JAY.

And there
Vowed, in a letter that I saw (as few did),
He lived but for his duty, and for her.

FALK.

[*As if completing her statement.*]

And with those words his Life's Romance concluded.

MRS. HALM.

[*Rising.*]

How if we should go out upon the lawn,
And see if there's no prospect of them yet?

MISS JAY.

[*Drawing on her mantle.*]

It's cool already.

MRS. HALM.

Svanhild, will you get
My woollen shawl?—Come ladies, pray!

LIND.

[*To* ANNA, *unobserved by the others.*]

Go on!

[SVANHILD *goes into the house; the others, except* FALK, *go towards the back and out to the left* LIND, *who has followed, stops and returns.*

LIND.

My friend!

FALK.

Ah, ditto.

LIND.

Falk, your hand! The tide
Of joy's so vehement, it will perforce
Break out—

FALK.

Hullo there; you must first be tried;
Sentence and hanging follow in due course.
Now, what on earth's the matter? To conceal
From me, your friend, this treasure of your finding;
For you'll confess the inference is binding:
You've come into a prize off Fortune's wheel!

LIND.

I've snared and taken Fortune's blessed bird!

FALK.

How? Living,—and undamaged by the steel?

LIND.

Patience; I'll tell the matter in one word.
I am engaged! Conceive—!

FALK.

[*Quickly.*]

Engaged!

LIND.

It's true.
To-day,—with unimagined courage swelling,
I said,—ahem, it will not bear re-telling;—

But only think,—the sweet young maiden grew
Quite rosy-red,—but not at all enraged!
You see, Falk, what I ventured for a bride!
She listened,—and I rather think she cried;
That, sure, means "Yes"?

FALK.

If precedents decide;
Go on.

LIND.

And so we really are—engaged?

FALK.

I should conclude so; but the only way
To be quite certain, is to ask Miss Jay.

LIND.

O no, I feel so confident, so clear!
So perfectly assured, and void of fear.
[*Radiantly, in a mysterious tone.*
Hark! I had leave her fingers to caress
When from the coffee-board she drew the cover.

FALK.

[*Lifting and emptying his glass.*]

Well, flowers of spring your wedding garland dress!

LIND.

[*Doing the same.*]

And here I swear by heaven that I will love her
Until I die, with love as infinite
As now glows in me,—for she is so sweet!

FALK.

Engaged! Aha, so that was why you flung
The Holy Law and Prophets on the shelf!

LIND.

[*Laughing.*]

And you believed it was the song you sung—!

FALK.

A poet believes all things of himself.

LIND.

[*Seriously.*]

Don't think, however, Falk, that I dismiss
The theologian from my hour of bliss.
Only, I find the Book will not suffice
As Jacob's ladder unto Paradise.
I must into God's world, and seek Him there.
A boundless kindness in my heart upsprings,
I love the straw, I love the creeping things;
They also in my joy shall have a share.

FALK.

Yes, only tell me this, though—

LIND.

I have told it,—
My precious secret, and our three hearts hold it!

FALK.

But have you thought about the future?

LIND.

Thought?
I?—thought about the future? No, from this
Time forth I live but in the hour that is.
In home shall all my happiness be sought;
We hold Fate's reins, we drive her hither, thither,
And neither friend nor mother shall have right
To say unto my budding blossom: Wither!
For I am earnest and her eyes are bright,
And so it must unfold into the light!

FALK.

Yes, Fortune likes you, you will serve her turn!

LIND.

My spirits like wild music glow and burn;
I feel myself a Titan: though a foss
Opened before me—I would leap across!

FALK.

Your love, you mean to say, in simple prose,
Has made a reindeer of you.

LIND.

Well, suppose;
But in my wildest flight, I know the nest
In which my heart's dove longs to be at rest!

FALK.

Well then, to-morrow it may fly *con brio;*
You're off into the hills with the quartette.
I'll guarantee you against cold and wet—

LIND.

Pooh, the quartette may go and climb in *trio*,
The lowly dale has mountain air for me;
Here I've the immeasurable fjord, the flowers,
Here I have warbling birds and choral bowers,
And lady Fortune's self,—for here is s h e !

FALK.

Ah, lady Fortune by our Northern water
Is *rara avis*,—hold her if you've caught her!
[*With a glance towards the house.*
Hist—Svanhild—

LIND.

Well; I go,—disclose to none
The secret that we share alone with o n e.
'Twas good of you to listen: now enfold it
Deep in your heart,—warm, glowing, as I told it.

[*He goes out in the background to the others.* FALK *looks after him a moment, and paces up and down in the garden, visibly striving to master his agitation. Presently* SVANHILD *comes out with a shawl on her arm, and is going towards the back.* FALK *approaches and gazes at her fixedly.* SVANHILD *stops.*

SVANHILD.

[*After a short pause.*]

You gaze so at me?

FALK.

[*Half to himself.*]

Yes, 'tis t h e r e—the same;
The shadow in her eyes' deep mirror sleeping,

The roguish elf about her lips a-peeping,
It i s there.

SVANHILD.

W h a t ? You frighten me.

FALK.

Your name
Is Svanhild?

SVANHILD.

Yes, you know it very well.

FALK.

But do y o u know the name is laughable?
I beg you to discard it from to-night!

SVANHILD.

That would be far beyond a daughter's right—

FALK.

[*Laughing.*]

Hm. "Svanhild! Svanhild!"
[*With sudden gravity.*
With your earliest breath
How came you by this prophecy of death?

SVANHILD.

Is it so grim?

FALK.

No, lovely as a song,
But for our age too great and stern and strong,
How can a modern demoiselle fill out

The ideal that heroic name expresses?
No, no, discard it with your outworn dresses.

SVANHILD.

You mean the mythical princess, no doubt—

FALK.

Who, guiltless, died beneath the horse's feet.

SVANHILD.

But now such acts are clearly obsolete.
No, no, I'll mount his saddle! There's my place!
How often have I dreamt, in pensive ease,
He bore me, buoyant, through the world apace,
His mane a flag of freedom in the breeze!

FALK.

Yes, the old tale. In "pensive ease" no mortal
Is stopped by thwarting bar or cullis'd portal;
Fearless we cleave the ether without bound;
In practice, tho', we shrewdly hug the ground;
For all love life and, having choice, will choose it;
And no man dares to leap where he may lose it.

SVANHILD.

Yes! show me but the end, I'll spurn the shore;
But let the end be worth the leaping for!
A Ballarat beyond the desert sands—
Else each will stay exactly where he stands.

FALK.

[*Sarcastically.*]

I grasp the case;—the due conditions fail.

SVANHILD.

[*Eagerly.*]

Exactly: what's the use of spreading sail
When there is not a breath of wind astir?

FALK.

[*Ironically.*]

Yes, what's the use of plying whip and spur
When there is not a penny of reward
For him who tears him from the festal board,
And mounts, and dashes headlong to perdition?
Such doing for the deed's sake asks a knight,
And knighthood's now an idle superstition.
That was your meaning, possibly?

SVANHILD.

Quite right.
Look at that fruit-tree in the orchard close,—
No blossom on its barren branches blows.
You should have seen last year with what brave airs
It staggered underneath its world of pears.

FALK.

[*Uncertain.*]

No doubt, but what's the moral you impute?

SVANHILD.

[*With finesse.*]

O, among other things, the bold unreason
Of modern Zacharies who seek for fruit.
If the tree blossom'd to excess last season,
You must not crave the blossoms back in this.

FALK.

I knew you'd find your footing in the ways
Of old Romance.

SVANHILD.

Yes, modern virtue is
Of quite another stamp. Who now arrays
Himself to battle for the truth? Who'll stake
His life and person fearless for truth's sake?
Where is the hero?

FALK.

[*Looking keenly at her.*]

Where is the Valkyria?

SVANHILD.

[*Shaking her head.*]

Valkyrias find no market in this land!
When the faith lately was assailed in Syria,
Did y o u go out with the crusader-band?
No, but on paper you were warm and willing,—
And sent the "Clerical Gazette" a shilling.

[*Pause.* FALK *is about to retort, but checks himself, and goes into the garden.*

SVANHILD.

[*After watching him a moment, approaches him and asks gently:*]

Falk, are you angry?

FALK.

No, I only brood,—

SVANHILD.

[*With thoughtful sympathy.*]

You seem to be two natures, still at feud,—
Unreconciled—

FALK.

I know it well.

SVANHILD.

[*Impetuously.*]

But why?

FALK.

[*Losing self-control.*]

Why, why? Because I hate to go about
With soul bared boldly to the vulgar eye,
As Jock and Jennie hang their passions out;
To wear my glowing heart upon my sleeve,
Like women in low dresses. You, alone,
Svanhild, you only,—you, I did believe,—
Well, it is past, that dream, for ever flown.—
[*She goes to the summer-house and looks out; he follows.*
You listen—?

SVANHILD.

To another voice, that sings.
Hark! every evening when the sun's at rest,
A little bird floats hither on beating wings,—
See there—it darted from its leafy nest—
And, do you know, it is my faith,—as oft
As God makes any songless soul, He sends
A little bird to be her friend of friends,
And sing for ever in her garden-croft.

FALK.

[*Picking up a stone.*]

Then must the owner and the bird be near,
Or its song's squandered on a stranger's ear.

SVANHILD.

Yes, that is true; but I've discovered mine.
Of speech and song I am denied the power,
But when it warbles in its leafy bower,
Poems flow in upon my brain like wine—
Ah, yes,—they fleet—they are not to be won—

[FALK *throws the stone.* SVANHILD *screams.*

O God, you've hit it! Ah, what have you done!

[*She hurries out to the right and then quickly returns.*

O pity! pity!

FALK.

[*In passionate agitation.*]

No,—but eye for eye,
Svanhild, and tooth for tooth. Now you'll attend
No further greetings from your garden-friend,
No guerdon from the land of melody.
That is my vengeance: as you slew, I slay.

SVANHILD.

I slew?

FALK.

You slew. Until this very day,
A clear-voiced song-bird warbled in my soul;
See,—now one passing bell for both may toll—
You've killed it!

SVANHILD.

Have I?

FALK.

Yes, for you have slain
My young, high-hearted, joyous exultation—
[*Contemptuously.*
By your betrothal!

SVANHILD.

How! But pray, explain—!

FALK.

O, it's in full accord with expectation;
He gets his licence, enters orders, speeds to
A post,—as missionary in the West—

SVANHILD.

[*In the same tone.*]

A pretty penny, also, he succeeds to;—
For it is Lind you speak of—?

FALK.

You know best
Of whom I speak.

SVANHILD.

[*With a subdued smile.*]

As the bride's sister, true,
I cannot help—

FALK.

Great God! It is not you—?

SVANHILD.

Who win this overplus of bliss? Ah no!

FALK.

[*With almost childish joy.*]

It is not you! O God be glorified!
What love, what mercy does He not bestow!
I shall not see you as another's bride;—
'Twas but the fire of pain He bade me bear—
[*Tries to seize her hand.*
O hear me, Svanhild, hear me then—

SVANHILD.

[*Pointing quickly to the background.*]

See there!

[*She goes towards the house. At the same moment* MRS. HALM, ANNA, MISS JAY, GULDSTAD, STIVER, *and* LIND *emerge from the background. During the previous scene the sun has set; it is now dark.*

MRS. HALM.

[*To* SVANHILD.]

The Strawmans may be momently expected
Where have you been?

MISS JAY.

[*After glancing at* FALK.]

Your colour's very high.

SVANHILD.

A little face-ache; it will soon pass by.

MRS. HALM.

And yet you walk at nightfall unprotected?
Arrange the room, and see that tea is ready;
Let everything be nice; I know the lady.

[SVANHILD *goes in.*

STIVER.

[*To* FALK.]

What is the colour of this parson's coat?

FALK.

I guess bread-taxers would not catch his vote.

STIVER.

How if one made allusion to the store
Of verses, yet unpublished, in my drawer?

FALK.

It might do something.

STIVER.

Would to heaven it might!
Our wedding's imminent; our purses light.
Courtship's a very serious affair.

FALK.

Just so: "*Qu'allais-tu faire dans cette galère?*"

STIVER.

Is courtship a "galère?"

FALK.

No, married lives;—
All servitude, captivity, and gyves.

STIVER.

[*Seeing* MISS JAY *approach.*]

You little know what wealth a man obtains
From woman's eloquence and woman's brains.

MISS JAY.

[*Aside to* STIVER.]

Will Guldstad give us credit, think you?

STIVER.

[*Peevishly.*]

I
Am not quite certain of it yet: I'll try.

[*They withdraw in conversation;* LIND *and* ANNA *approach.*

LIND.

[*Aside to* FALK.]

I can't endure it longer; in post-haste
I must present her—

FALK.

You had best refrain,
And not initiate the eye profane
Into your mysteries—

LIND.

That would be a jest!—
From you, my fellow-boarder, and my mate,
To keep concealed my new-found happy state!
Nay, now, my head with Fortune's oil anointed—

FALK.

You think the occasion good to get it c u r l e d ?
Well, my good friend, you won't be disappointed;
Go and announce your union to the world!

LIND.

Other reflections also weigh with me,
And one of more especial gravity;
Say that there lurked among our motley band
Some sneaking, sly, pretender to her hand;
Say, his attentions became undisguised,—
We should be disagreeably compromised.

FALK.

Yes, it is true; it had escaped my mind,
You for a higher office were designed,
Love as his young licentiate has retained you;
Shortly you'll get a permanent position;
But it would be defying all tradition
If at the present moment he ordained you.

LIND.

Yes if the merchant does not—

FALK.

What of him?

ANNA.

[*Troubled.*]

Oh, it is Lind's unreasonable whim.

LIND.

Hush; I've a deep foreboding that the man
Will rob me of my treasure, if he can.

The fellow, as we know, comes daily down,
Is rich, unmarried, takes you round the town;
In short, my own, regard it as we will,
There are a thousand things that bode us ill.

ANNA.

[*Sighing.*]

Oh, it's too bad; to-day was so delicious.

FALK.

[*Sympathetically to* LIND.]

Don't wreck your joy, unfoundedly suspicious,
Don't hoist your flag till time the truth disclose—

ANNA.

Great God! Miss Jay is looking; hush, be still!
[*She and* LIND *withdraw in different directions.*

FALK.

[*Looking after* LIND.]

So to the ruin of his youth he goes.

GULDSTAD.

[*Who has meantime been conversing on the steps with* MRS. HALM *and* MISS JAY, *approaches* FALK *and slaps him on the shoulder.*

Well, brooding on a poem?

FALK.

No, a play.

GULDSTAD.

The deuce;—I never heard it was your line.

FALK.

O no, the author is a friend of mine,
And your acquaintance also, I daresay.
The knave's a dashing writer, never doubt.
Only imagine, in a single day
He's worked a perfect little Idyll out.

GULDSTAD.

[*Slily.*]

With happy ending, doubtless!

FALK.

You're aware,
No curtain falls but on a plighted pair.
Thus with the Trilogy's First Part we've reckoned;
But now the poet's labour-throes begin;
The Comedy of Troth-plight, Part the Second,
Thro' five insipid Acts he has to spin,
And of that staple, finally, compose
Part Third,—or Wedlock's Tragedy, in prose.

GULDSTAD.

[*Smiling.*]

The poet's vein is catching, it would seem.

FALK.

Really? How so, pray?

GULDSTAD.

Since I also pore
And ponder over a poetic scheme,—
[*Mysteriously.*
An actuality—and not a dream.

FALK.

And pray, who is the hero of your theme?

GULDSTAD.

I'll tell you that to-morrow—not before.

FALK.

It is yourself!

GULDSTAD.

You think me equal to it?

FALK.

I'm sure no other mortal man could do it.
But then the heroine? No city maid,
I'll swear, but of the country, breathing balm?

GULDSTAD.

[*Lifting his finger.*]

Ah,—that's the point, and must not be betrayed!—
[*Changing his tone.*
Pray tell me your opinion of Miss Halm.

FALK.

O you're best able to pronounce upon her;
My voice can neither credit nor dishonour,—
[*Smiling.*
But just take care no mischief-maker blot
This fine poetic scheme of which you talk.
Suppose I were so shameless as to balk
The meditated climax of the plot?

GULDSTAD.

[*Good-naturedly.*]

Well, I would cry "Amen," and change my plan.

FALK.

What!

GULDSTAD.

Why, you see, you are a letter'd man;
How monstrous were it if your skill'd design
Were ruined by a bungler's hand like mine!
[*Retires to the background.*

FALK.

[*In passing, to* LIND.]

Yes, you were right; the merchant's really scheming
The ruin of your new-won happiness.

LIND.

[*Aside to* ANNA.]

Now then you see, my doubting was not dreaming;
We'll go this very moment and confess.
[*They approach* MRS. HALM, *who is standing with* MISS JAY *by the house.*

GULDSTAD.

[*Conversing with* STIVER.]

'Tis a fine evening.

STIVER.

Very likely,—when
A man's disposed—

GULDSTAD.

[*Facetiously.*]

What, all not running smooth
In true love's course?

STIVER.

Not that exactly—

FALK.

[*Coming up.*]

Then
With your engagement?

STIVER.

That's about the truth.

FALK.

Hurrah! Your spendthrift pocket has a groat
Or two still left, it seems, of poetry.

STIVER.

[*Stiffly.*]

I cannot see what poetry has got
To do with my engagement, or with me.

FALK.

You are not meant to see; when lovers prove
What love is, all is over with their love.

GULDSTAD.

[*To* STIVER.]

But if there's matter for adjustment, pray
Let's hear it.

STIVER.

I've been pondering all day
Whether the thing is proper to disclose,
But still the Ayes are balanced by the Noes.

FALK.

I'll right you in one sentence. Ever since
As plighted lover you were first installed,
You've felt yourself, if I may say so, galled—

STIVER.

And sometimes to the quick.

FALK.

You've had to wince
Beneath a crushing load of obligations
That you'd send packing, if good form permitted.
That's what's the matter.

STIVER.

Monstrous accusations!
My legal debts I've honestly acquitted;
But other bonds next month are falling due;
[*To* GULDSTAD.
When a man weds, you see, he gets a wife—

FALK.

[*Triumphant.*]

Now your youth's heaven once again is blue,
There rang an echo from your old song-life!
That's how it is: I read you thro' and thro';
Wings, wings were all you wanted,—and a knife!

STIVER.

A knife?

FALK.

Yes, Resolution's knife, to sever
Each captive bond, and set you free for ever,
To soar—

STIVER.

[*Angrily.*]

Nay, now you're insolent beyond
Endurance! Me to charge with violation
Of law,—me, me with plotting to abscond!
It's libellous, malicious defamation,
Insult and calumny—

FALK.

Are you insane?
What is all this about? Explain! Explain!

GULDSTAD.

[*Laughingly to* STIVER.]

Yes, clear your mind of all this balderdash!
What do you want?

STIVER.

[*Pulling himself together.*]

A trifling loan in cash.

FALK.

A loan!

STIVER.

[*Hurriedly to* GULDSTAD.]

That is, I mean to say, you know,
A voucher for a ten pound note, or so.

MISS JAY.

[*To* LIND *and* ANNA.]

I wish you joy! How lovely, how delicious!

GULDSTAD.

[*Going up to the ladies.*]

Pray what has happened?

[*To himself.*]

This was unpropitious.

FALK.

[*Throws his arms about* STIVER'S *neck.*]

Hurrah! the trumpet's dulcet notes proclaim
A brother born to you in Amor's name!

[*Drags him to the others.*

MISS JAY.

[*To the gentlemen.*]

Think! Lind and Anna—think!—have plighted hearts,
Affianced lovers!

MRS. HALM.

[*With tears of emotion.*]

'Tis the eighth in order
Who well-provided from this house departs;

[*To* FALK.

Seven nieces wedded—always with a boarder—

[*Is overcome; presses her handkerchief to her eyes.*

MISS JAY.

[*To* ANNA.]

Well, there will come a flood of gratulation!
[*Caresses her with emotion.*

LIND.

[*Seizing* FALK'S *hand.*]

My friend, I walk in rapt intoxication!

FALK.

Hold! As a plighted man you are a member
Of Rapture's Temperance-association.
Observe its rules;—no orgies here, remember!
[*Turning to* GULDSTAD *sympathetically.*
Well, my good sir!

GULDSTAD.

[*Beaming with pleasure.*]

I think this promises
All happiness for both.

FALK.

[*Staring at him.*]

You seem to stand
The shock with exemplary self-command.
That's well.

GULDSTAD.

What do you mean, sir?

FALK.

Only this;
That inasmuch as you appeared to feed
Fond expectations of your own—

GULDSTAD.

Indeed?

FALK.

At any rate, you were upon the scent.
You named Miss Halm; you stood upon this spot
And asked me—

GULDSTAD.

[*Smiling.*]

There are two, though, are there not?

FALK.

It was—the other sister that you meant?

GULDSTAD.

That sister, yes, the other one,—just so.
Judge for yourself, when you have come to know
That sister better, if she has not in her
Merits which, if they were divined, would win her
A little more regard than we bestow.

FALK.

[*Coldly.*]

Her virtues are of every known variety
I'm sure.

GULDSTAD.

Not quite; the accent of society
She cannot hit exactly; there she loses.

FALK.

A grievous fault.

GULDSTAD.

But if her mother chooses
To spend a winter on her, she'll come out of it
Queen of them all, I'll wager.

FALK.

Not a doubt of it.

GULDSTAD.

[*Laughing.*]

Young women are odd creatures, to be sure!

FALK.

[*Gaily.*]

Like winter rye-seed, canopied secure
By frost and snow, invisibly they sprout.

GULDSTAD.

Then in the festive ball-room bedded out—

FALK.

With equivoque and scandal for manure—

GULDSTAD.

And when the April sun shines—

FALK.

There the blade is;
The seed shot up in mannikin green ladies!
[LIND *comes up and seizes* FALK'S *hand.*

LIND.

How well I chose,—past understanding well;—
I feel a bliss that nothing can dispel.

GULDSTAD.

There stands your mistress; tell us, if you can,
The right demeanour for a plighted man.

LIND.

[*Perturbed.*]

That's a third person's business to declare.

GULDSTAD.

[*Joking.*]

Ill-tempered! This to Anna's ears I'll bear.
[*Goes to the ladies.*

LIND.

[*Looking after him.*]

Can such a man be tolerated?

FALK.

You
Mistook his aim, however,—

LIND.

And how so?

FALK.

It was not Anna that he had in view.

LIND.

How, was it Svanhild?

FALK.

Well, I hardly know.
[*Whimsically.*
Forgive me, martyr to another's cause!

LIND.

What do you mean?

FALK.

You've read the news to-night?

LIND.

No.

FALK.

Do so. There 'tis told in black and white
Of one who, ill-luck's bitter counsel taking,
Had his sound teeth extracted from his jaws
Because his cousin-german's teeth were aching.

MISS JAY.

[*Looking out to the left.*]

Here comes the priest!

MRS. HALM.

Now see a man of might!

STIVER.

Five children, six, seven, eight—

FALK.

And, heavens, all recent!

MISS JAY.

Ugh! it is almost to be called indecent.

[*A carriage has meantime been heard stopping outside to the left.* STRAWMAN, *his wife, and eight little girls, all in travelling dress, enter one by one.*

MRS. HALM.

[*Advancing to meet them.*]

Welcome, a hearty welcome!

STRAWMAN.

Thank you.

MRS. STRAWMAN.

Is it

A party?

MRS. HALM.

No, dear madam, not at all.

MRS. STRAWMAN.

If we disturb you—

MRS. HALM.

Au contraire, your visit
Could in no wise more opportunely fall.
My Anna's just engaged.

STRAWMAN.

[*Shaking* ANNA'S *hand with unction.*]

Ah then, I must
Bear witness;—Lo! in wedded Love's presented
A treasure such as neither moth nor rust
Corrupt—if it be duly supplemented.

MRS. HALM.

But how delightful that your little maids
Should follow you to town.

STRAWMAN.

Four tender blades
We have besides.

MRS. HALM.

Ah, really?

STRAWMAN.

Three of whom
Are still too infantine to take to heart
A loving father's absence, when I come
To town for sessions.

MISS JAY.

[*To* MRS. HALM, *bidding farewell.*]

Now I must depart

MRS. HALM

O, it is still so early!

MISS JAY.

I must fly
To town and spread the news. The Storms, I know,

Go late to rest, they will be up; and oh!
How glad the aunts will be! Now, dear, put by
Your shyness; for to-morrow a spring-tide
Of callers will flow in from every side!

MRS. HALM.

Well, then, good-night.
[*To the others.*
Now friends, what would you say
To drinking tea?
[*To* MRS. STRAWMAN.
Pray, madam, lead the way.

[MRS. HALM, STRAWMAN, *his wife and children, with* GULDSTAD, LIND, *and* ANNA *go into the house.*

MISS JAY.

[*Taking* STIVER'S *arm.*]

Now let's be tender! Look how softly floats
Queen Luna on her throne o'er lawn and lea!
Well, but you are not looking!

STIVER.

[*Crossly.*]
Yes, I see;
I'm thinking of the promissory notes.

[*They go out to the left.* FALK, *who has been continuously watching* STRAWMAN *and his wife, remains behind alone in the garden. It is now dark; the house is lighted up.*

FALK.

All is as if burnt out; all desolate, dead—!
So thro' the world they wander, two and two;

Charred wreckage, like the blackened stems that strew
The forest when the withering fire is fled.
Far as the eye can travel, all is drought,
And nowhere peeps one spray of verdure out!

[SVANHILD *comes out on to the verandah with a flowering rose-tree which she sets down.*

Yes one—yes one—!

SVANHILD.

Falk, in the dark?

FALK.

And fearless!
Darkness to me is fair, and light is cheerless.
But are not y o u afraid in yonder walls
Where the lamp's light on sallow corpses falls—

SVANHILD.

Shame!

FALK.

[*Looking after* STRAWMAN, *who appears at the window.*

He was once so brilliant and so strong;
Warred with the world to win his mistress; passed
For Custom's doughtiest iconoclast;
And poured forth love in pæans of glad song—!
Look at him now! In solemn robes and wraps,
A two-legged drama on his own collapse!
And she, the limp-skirt slattern, with the shoes
Heel-trodden, that squeak and clatter in her traces,
This is the winged maid who was his Muse
And escort to the kingdom of the graces!
Of all that fire this puff of smoke's the end!
Sic transit gloria amoris, friend.

SVANHILD.

Yes, it is wretched, wretched past compare.
I know of no one's lot that I would share.

FALK.

[*Eagerly.*]

Then let us two rise up and bid defiance
To this same order Art, not Nature, bred!

SVANHILD.

[*Shaking her head.*]

Then were the cause for which we made alliance
Ruined, as sure as this is earth we tread.

FALK.

No, triumph waits upon two souls in unity.
To Custom's parish-church no more we'll wend,
Seatholders in the Philistine community.
See, Personality's one aim and end
Is to be independent, free and true.
In that I am not wanting, nor are you.
A fiery spirit pulses in your veins,
For thoughts that master, you have words that burn;
The corslet of convention, that constrains
The beating hearts of other maids, you spurn.
The voice that you were born with will not chime to
The chorus Custom's baton gives the time to.

SVANHILD.

And do you think pain has not often pressed
Tears from my eyes, and quiet from my breast?
I longed to shape my way to my own bent—

FALK.

"In pensive ease?"

SVANHILD.

O no, 'twas sternly meant.
But then the aunts came in with well-intended
Advice, the matter must be sifted, weighed—
[*Coming nearer*
"In pensive ease," you say; oh no, I made
A bold experiment—in art.

FALK.

Which ended—?

SVANHILD.

In failure. I lacked talent for the brush.
The thirst for freedom, tho', I could not crush;
Checked at the easel, it essayed the stage—

FALK.

That plan was shattered also, I engage?

SVANHILD.

Upon the eldest aunt's suggestion, yes;
She much preferred a place as governess—

FALK.

But of all this I never heard a word!

SVANHILD.

[*Smiling.*]

No wonder; they took care that none was heard.
They trembled at the risk "my future" ran
If this were whispered to unmarried Man.

FALK.

[*After gazing a moment at her in meditative sympathy.*]

That such must be your lot I long had guessed.
When first I met you, I can well recall,
You seemed to me quite other than the rest,
Beyond the comprehension of them all.
They sat at table,—fragrant tea a-brewing,
And small-talk humming with the tea in tune,
The young girls blushing and the young men cooing,
Like pigeons on a sultry afternoon.
Old maids and matrons volubly averred
Morality and faith's supreme felicity,
Young wives were loud in praise of domesticity,
While you stood lonely like a mateless bird.
And when at last the gabbling clamour rose
To a tea-orgy, a debauch of prose,
You seemed a piece of silver, newly minted,
Among foul notes and coppers, dulled and dinted.
You were a coin imported, alien, strange,
Here valued at another rate of change,
Not passing current in that babel mart
Of poetry and butter, cheese and art.
Then—while Miss Jay in triumph took the field—

SVANHILD.

[*Gravely.*]

Her knight behind her, like a champion bold,
His hat upon his elbow, like a shield—

FALK.

Your mother nodded to your untouched cup:
"Drink, Svanhild dear, before your tea grows cold."

And then you drank the vapid liquor up,
The mawkish brew beloved of young and old.
But that name gripped me with a sudden spell;
The grim old Völsungs as they fought and fell,
With all their faded æons, seemed to rise
In never-ending line before my eyes.
In you I saw a Svanhild, like the old,[1]
But fashioned to the modern age's mould.
Sick of its hollow warfare is the world;
Its lying banner it would fain have furled;
But when the world does evil, its offence
Is blotted in the blood of innocence.

SVANHILD.

[*With gentle irony.*]

I think, at any rate, the fumes of tea
Must answer for that direful fantasy;
But 'tis your least achievement, past dispute,
To hear the spirit speaking, when 'tis mute.

FALK.

[*With emotion*

Nay, Svanhild, do not jest: behind your scoff
Tears glitter,—O, I see them plain enough.
And I see more: when you to dust are fray'd,
And kneaded to a formless lump of clay,
Each bungling dilettante's scalpel-blade
On you his dull devices shall display.
The world usurps the creature of God's hand
And sets its image in the place of His,
Transforms, enlarges that part, lightens this;
And when upon the pedestal you stand

[1] See Notes, page 483.

Complete, cries out in triumph: "N o w she is
At last what woman ought to be: Behold,
How plastically calm, how marble-cold!
Bathed in the lamplight's soft irradiation,
How well in keeping with the decoration!"
[*Passionately seizing her hand.*
But if you are to die, live first! Come forth
With me into the glory of God's earth!
Soon, soon the gilded cage will claim its prize.
The Lady thrives there, but the Woman dies,
And I love nothing but the Woman in you.
There, if they will, let others woo and win you,
But here, my spring of life began to shoot,
Here my Song-tree put forth its firstling fruit;
Here I found wings and flight:—Svanhild, I know it,
Only be mine,—here I shall grow a poet!

SVANHILD.

[*In gentle reproof, withdrawing her hand.*]

O, why have you betrayed yourself? How sweet
It was when we as friends could freely meet!
You should have kept your counsel. Can we stake
Our bliss upon a word that we may break?
Now you have spoken, all is over.

FALK.

No!
I've pointed to the goal,—now leap with me,
My high-souled Svanhild—if you dare, and show
That you have heart and courage to be free.

SVANHILD.

Be free?

FALK.

Yes, free, for freedom's all-in-all
Is absolutely to fulfil our Call.
And you by heaven were destined, I know well,
To be my bulwark against beauty's spell.
I, like my falcon namesake, have to swing
Against the wind, if I would reach the sky!
You are the breeze I must be breasted by,
You, only you, put vigour in my wing:
Be mine, be mine, until the world shall take you,
When leaves are falling, then our paths shall part.
Sing unto me the treasures of your heart,
And for each song another song I'll make you;
So may you pass into the lamplit glow
Of age, as forests fade without a throe.

SVANHILD.

[*With suppressed bitterness.*]

I cannot thank you, for your words betray
The meaning of your kind solicitude.
You eye me as a boy a sallow, good
To cut and play the flute on for a day.

FALK.

Yes, better than to linger in the swamp
Till autumn choke it with her grey mists damp!
[*Vehemently.*
You must! you shall! To me you must present
What God to you so bountifully lent.
I speak in song what you in dreams have meant.
See yonder bird I innocently slew,

Her warbling was Song's book of books for you.
O, yield your music as she yielded hers!
My life shall be that music set to verse!

SVANHILD.

And when you know me, when my songs are flown,
And my last requiem chanted from the bough,—
What then?

FALK.

[*Observing her.*]

What then? Ah well, remember now!
[*Pointing to the garden.*

SVANHILD.

[*Gently.*]

Yes, I remember you can drive a stone.

FALK.

[*With a scornful laugh.*]

This is your vaunted soul of freedom therefore!
All daring, if it had an end to dare for!
[*Vehemently.*
I've shown you one; now, once for all, your yea
Or nay.

SVANHILD.

You know the answer I must make you:
I never can accept you in your way.

FALK.

[*Coldly, breaking off.*]

Then there's an end of it; the world may take you!

[SVANHILD *has silently turned away. She supports her hands upon the verandah railing, and rests her head upon them.*

FALK.

[*Walks several times up and down, takes a cigar, stops near her and says, after a pause:*

You think the topic of my talk to-night
Extremely ludicrous, I should not wonder?

[*Pauses for an answer.* SVANHILD *is silent.*

I'm very conscious that it was a blunder;
Sister's and daughter's love alone possess you;
Henceforth I'll wear kid gloves when I address you,
Sure, so, of being understood aright.

[*Pauses, but as* SVANHILD *remains motionless, he turns and goes towards the right.*

SVANHILD.

[*Lifting her head after a brief silence, looking at him and drawing nearer.*]

Now I will recompense your kind intent
To save me, with an earnest admonition.
That falcon-image gave me sudden vision
What your "emancipation" really meant.
You said you were the falcon, that must fight
Athwart the wind if it would reach the sky,
I was the breeze you must be breasted by,
Else vain were all your faculty of flight;

How pitifully mean! How paltry! Nay
How ludicrous, as you yourself divined!
That seed, however, fell not by the way,
But bred another fancy in my mind
Of a far more illuminating kind.
You, as I saw it, were no falcon, but
A tuneful dragon, out of paper cut,
Whose Ego holds a secondary station,
Dependent on the string for animation;
Its breast was scrawled with promises to pay
In cash poetic,—at some future day;
The wings were stiff with barbs and shafts of wit
That wildly beat the air, but never hit;
The tail was a satiric rod in pickle
To castigate the town's infirmities,
But all it compass'd was to lightly tickle
The casual doer of some small amiss.
So you lay helpless at my feet, imploring:
"O raise me, how and where is all the same!
Give me the power of singing and of soaring,
No matter at what cost of bitter blame!"

FALK.

[*Clenching his fists in inward agitation.*]

Heaven be my witness—!

SVANHILD.

No, you must be told:—
For such a childish sport I am too old.
But you, whom Nature made for high endeavour,
Are you content the fields of air to tread
Hanging your poet's life upon a thread
That at my pleasure I can slip and sever?

FALK.

[*Hurriedly.*]

What is the date to-day?

SVANHILD.

[*More gently.*]

Why, now, that's right!
Mind well this day, and heed it, and beware;
Trust to your own wings only for your flight,
Sure, if they do not break, that they will bear.
The paper poem for the desk is fit,
That which is lived alone has life in it;
T h a t only has the wings that scale the height;
Choose now between them, poet: be, or write!

[*Nearer to him.*

Now, I have done what you besought me; now
My requiem is chanted from the bough;
My only one; now all my songs are flown;
Now if you will, I'm ready for the stone!

[*She goes into the house;* FALK *remains motionless, looking after her; far out on the fjord is seen a boat, from which the following chorus is faintly heard:*

CHORUS.

My wings I open, my sails spread wide,
And cleave like an eagle life's glassy tide;
Gulls follow my furrow's foaming;
Overboard with the ballast of care and cark;
And what if I shatter my roaming bark,
It is passing sweet to be roaming!

FALK.

[*Starting from a reverie.*]

What, music? Ah, it will be Lind's quartette
Getting their jubilation up.—Well met!
[*To* GULDSTAD, *who enters with an overcoat on his arm.*
Ah, slipping off, sir?

GULDSTAD.

Yes, with your goodwill.
But let me first put on my overcoat.
We prose-folks are susceptible to chill;
The night wind takes us by the tuneless throat.
Good evening!

FALK.

Sir, a word ere you proceed!
Show me a task, a mighty one, you know—!
I'm going in for life—!

GULDSTAD.

[*With ironical emphasis.*]

Well, in you go!
You'll find that you are i n for it, indeed.

FALK.

[*Looking reflectively at him, says slowly.*]

There is my program, furnished in a phrase.
[*In a lively outburst.*
N o w I have wakened from my dreaming days,
I've cast the die of life's supreme transaction,
I'll show you—else the devil take me—

GULDSTAD.

Fie,
No cursing; curses never scared a fly.

FALK.

Words, words, no more, but action, only action!
I will reverse the plan of the Creation;—
Six days were lavish'd in that occupation;
My world's still lying void and desolate,
Hurrah, to-morrow, Sunday—I'll create!

GULDSTAD.

[*Laughing.*]

Yes, strip, and tackle it like a man, that's right!
But first go in and sleep on it. Good-night!

[*Goes out to the left.* SVANHILD *appears in the room over the verandah; she shuts the window and draws down the blind.*

FALK.

No, first I'll act. I've slept too long and late.

[*Looks up at* SVANHILD'S *window, and exclaims, as if seized with a sudden resolution:*

Good-night! Good-night! Sweet dreams to-night be thine;
To-morrow, Svanhild, thou art plighted mine!

[*Goes out quickly to the right; from the water the* CHORUS *is heard again.*

CHORUS.

Maybe I shall shatter my roaming bark,
But it's passing sweet to be roaming!

[*The boat slowly glides away as the curtain falls.*

ACT SECOND

Sunday afternoon. Well-dressed ladies and gentlemen are drinking coffee on the verandah. Several of the guests appear through the open glass door in the garden-room; the following song is heard from within.

CHORUS.

Welcome, welcome, new plighted pair
To the merry ranks of the plighted!
Now you may revel as free as air,
Caress without stint and kiss without care,—
No longer of footfall affrighted.

Now you are licensed, wherever you go,
To the rapture of cooing and billing;
Now you have leisure love's seed to sow,
Water, and tend it, and make it grow;—
Let us see you've a talent for tilling!

MISS JAY.

[*Within.*]

Ah Lind, if I only had chanced to hear,
I would have teased you!

A LADY.

[*Within.*]

How vexatious though!

ANOTHER LADY.

[*In the doorway.*]

Dear Anna, did he ask in w r i t i n g ?

AN AUNT.

No!

MISS JAY.

M i n e did.

A LADY.

[*On the verandah.*]

How long has it been secret, dear?

[*Runs into the room.*

MISS JAY.

To-morrow there will be the ring to choose.

LADIES.

[*Eagerly.*]

We'll take his measure!

MISS JAY.

Nay; that s h e must do.

MRS. STRAWMAN.

[*On the verandah, to a lady who is busy with embroidery.*]

What kind of knitting-needles do you use?

A SERVANT.

[*In the door with a coffee-pot.*]

More coffee, madam?

A LADY.

Thanks, a drop or two.

MISS JAY.

[*To* ANNA.]

How fortunate you've got your new manteau
Next week to go your round of visits in!

AN ELDERLY LADY.

[*At the window.*]

When shall we go and order the trousseau?

MRS. STRAWMAN.

How are they selling cotton-bombasine?

A GENTLEMAN.

[*To some ladies on the verandah.*]

Just look at Lind and Anna; what's his sport?

LADIES.

[*With shrill ecstasy.*]

Gracious, he kissed her glove!

OTHERS.

[*Similarly, springing up.*]

No! Kiss'd it? Really?

LIND.

[*Appears, red and embarrassed, in the doorway.*]

O, stuff and nonsense! [*Disappears.*

MISS JAY.

Yes, I saw it clearly.

STIVER.

[*In the door, with a coffee-cup in one hand and a biscuit in the other.*]

The witnesses must not mislead the court;
I here make affidavit, they're in error.

MISS JAY.

[*Within.*]

Come forward, Anna; stand before this mirror!

SOME LADIES.

[*Calling.*]

You, too, Lind!

MISS JAY.

Back to back! A little nearer!

LADIES.

Come, let us see by how much she is short.

[*All run into the garden-room; laughter and shrill talk are heard for awhile from within.*

[FALK, *who during the preceding scene has been walking about in the garden, advances into the foreground, stops and looks in until the noise has somewhat abated.*

FALK.

There love's romance is being done to death.—
The butcher once who boggled at the slaughter,
Prolonging needlessly the ox's breath,—

He got his twenty days of bread and water;
But these—these butchers yonder—they go free.
[*Clenches his fist.*
I could be tempted—; hold, words have no worth,
I've sworn it, action only from henceforth!

LIND.

[*Coming hastily but cautiously out.*]

Thank God, they're talking fashions; now's my chance
To slip away—

FALK.

Ha, Lind, you've drawn the prize
Of luck,—congratulations buzz and dance
All day about you, like a swarm of flies.

LIND.

They're all at heart so kindly and so nice;
But rather fewer clients would suffice.
Their helping hands begin to gall and fret me:
I'll get a moment's respite, if they'll let me.
[*Going out to the right.*

FALK.

Whither away?

LIND.

Our den;—it has a lock;
In case you find the oak is sported, knock.

FALK.

But shall I not fetch Anna to you?

LIND.

No—
If she wants anything, she'll let me know.
Last night we were discussing until late;
We've settled almost everything of weight;
Besides I think it scarcely goes with piety
To have too much of one's beloved's society.

FALK.

Yes, you are right; for daily food we need
A simple diet.

LIND.

Pray excuse me, friend.
I want a whiff of reason and the weed;
I haven't smoked for three whole days on end.
My blood was pulsing in such agitation,
I trembled for rejection all the time—

FALK.

Yes, you may well desire recuperation—

LIND.

And won't tobacco's flavour be sublime!

[*Goes out to the right.* MISS JAY *and some other* LADIES *come out of the garden-room.*

MISS JAY.

[*To* FALK.]

That was he surely?

FALK.

Yes, your hunted deer.

LADIES.

To run away from us!

OTHERS.

For shame! For shame!

FALK.

'Tis a bit shy at present, but, no fear,
A week of servitude will make him tame.

MISS JAY.

[*Looking round.*]

Where is he hid?

FALK.

His present hiding-place
Is in the garden loft, our common lair; [*Blandly.*

But let me beg you not to seek him there;
Give him a breathing time!

MISS JAY.

Well, good: the grace
Will not be long, tho'.

FALK.

Nay, be generous!
Ten minutes,—then begin the game again.
He has an English sermon on the brain.

MISS JAY.

An English—?

LADIES.

O you laugh! You're fooling us!

FALK.

I'm in grim earnest. 'Tis his fixed intention
To take a charge among the emigrants,
And therefore—

MISS JAY.

[*With horror.*]

Heavens, he had the face to mention
That mad idea? [*To the ladies.*
O quick—fetch all the aunts!
Anna, her mother, Mrs. Strawman too.

LADIES.

[*Agitated.*]

This must be stopped!

ALL.

We'll make a great ado!

MISS JAY.

Thank God, they're coming.

[*To* ANNA, *who comes from the garden-room with* STRAWMAN, *his wife and children,* STIVER, GULDSTAD, MRS. HALM *and the other guests.*

MISS JAY.

Do you know what Lind
Has secretly determined in his mind?
To go as missionary—

ANNA.

Yes, I know.

MRS. HALM.

And you've agreed—!

ANNA.

[*Embarrassed.*]

That I will also go.

MISS JAY.

[*Indignant.*]

He's talked this stuff to you!

LADIES.

[*Clasping their hands together.*]

What tyranny!

FALK.

But think, his Call that would not be denied—!

MISS JAY.

Tut, that's what people follow when they're free:
A bridegroom follows nothing but his bride.—
No, my sweet Anna, ponder, I entreat:
You, reared in comfort from your earliest breath—?

FALK.

Yet, sure, to suffer for the faith is sweet!

MISS JAY.

Is one to suffer for one's bridegroom's faith?
That is a rather novel point of view.
[*To the ladies.*
Ladies, attend!
[*Takes* ANNA'S *arm.*
Now listen; then repeat
For his instruction what he has to do.

[*They go into the background and out to the right in eager talk with several of the ladies; the other guests disperse in groups about the garden.* FALK *stops* STRAWMAN, *whose wife and children keep close to him.* GULDSTAD *goes to and fro during the following conversation.*

FALK.

Come, pastor, help young fervour in its fight,
Before they lure Miss Anna from her vows.

STRAWMAN.

[*In clerical cadence.*]

The wife must be submissive to the spouse;—
[*Reflecting.*
But if I apprehended him aright,
His Call's a problematical affair,
The Offering altogether in the air—

FALK.

Pray do not judge so rashly. I can give
You absolute assurance, as I live,
His Call is definite and incontestable—

STRAWMAN.

[*Seeing it in a new light.*]

Ah—if there's something fixed—investable—
P e r a n n u m—then I've nothing more to say.

FALK.

[*Impatiently.*]

You think the most of what I count the least;
I mean the i n s p i r a t i o n,—not the p a y!

STRAWMAN.

[*With an unctuous smile.*]

Pay is the first condition of a priest
In Asia, Africa, America,
Or where you will. Ah yes, if he were free,
My dear young friend, I willingly agree,
The thing might pass; but, being pledged and bound,
He'll scarcely find the venture very sound.
Reflect, he's young and vigorous, sure to found
A little family in time; assume his will
To be the very best on earth—but still
The m e a n s, my friend—? 'Build not upon the sand,'
Says Scripture. If, upon the other hand,
The Offering—

FALK.

That's no trifle, I'm aware.

STRAWMAN.

Ah, come—that wholly alters the affair.
When men are zealous in their Offering,
And liberal—

FALK.

There he far surpasses most.

STRAWMAN.

"He" say you? How? In virtue of his post
The Offering is not what he has to b r i n g
But what he has to g e t.

MRS. STRAWMAN.

[*Looking towards the background.*]

They're sitting there.

FALK.

[*After staring a moment in amazement, suddenly understands and bursts out laughing.*]

Hurrah for Offerings—the ones that caper
And strut—on Holy-days—in bulging paper!

STRAWMAN.

All the year round the curb and bit we bear,
But Whitsuntide and Christmas make things square.

FALK.

[*Gaily.*]

Why then, provided only there's enough of it,
Even family-founders will obey their Calls.

STRAWMAN.

Of course; a man assured the *quantum suff.* of it
Will preach the Gospel to the cannibals.

[*Sotto voce.*

Now I must see if she cannot be led,
[*To one of the little girls.*
My little Mattie, fetch me out my head—
My pipe-head I should say, my little dear—
[*Feels in his coat-tail pocket.*
Nay, wait a moment tho': I have it here.
[*Goes across and fills his pipe, followed by his wife and children.*

GULDSTAD.

[*Approaching.*]

You seem to play the part of serpent in
This paradise of lovers.

FALK.

O, the pips
Upon the tree of knowledge are too green
To be a lure for anybody's lips.
[*To* LIND, *who comes in from the right.*
Ha, Lind!

LIND.

In Heaven's name, who's been ravaging
Our sanctum? There the lamp lies dashed
To pieces, curtain dragged to floor, pen smashed,
And on the mantelpiece the ink pot splashed—

FALK.

[*Clapping him on the shoulder.*]

This wreck's the first announcement of my spring;
No more behind drawn curtains I will sit,
Making pen poetry with lamp alit;

My dull domestic poetising's done,
I'll walk by day, and glory in the sun:
My spring has come, my soul has broken free,
Action henceforth shall be my poetry.

LIND.

Make poetry of what you please for me;
But how if Mrs. Halm should take amiss
Your breaking of her furniture to pieces?

FALK.

What!—she, who lays her daughters and her nieces
Upon the altar of her boarders' bliss,—
She frown at such a bagatelle as this!

LIND.

[*Angrily.*]

It's utterly outrageous and unfair,
And compromises me as well as you!
But that's her business, settle it with her.
The lamp was mine, tho', shade and burner too—

FALK.

Tut, on that head, I've no account to render;
You have God's summer sunshine in its splendour,—
What would you with the lamp?

LIND.

You are grotesque;
You utterly forget that summer passes;
If I'm to make a figure in my classes
At Christmas I must buckle to my desk.

FALK.

[*Staring at him.*]

What, you look f o r w a r d ?

LIND.

To be sure I do,
The examination's amply worth it too.

FALK.

Ah but—you 'only sit and live'—remember!
Drunk with the moment, you demand no more—
Not even a modest third-class next December.
You've caught the bird of Fortune fair and fleet,
You feel as if the world with all its store
Were scattered in profusion at your feet.

LIND.

Those were my words; they must be understood,
Of course, *cum grano salis*—

FALK.

Very good!

LIND.

In the f o r e n o o n s I will enjoy my bliss;
That I am quite resolved on—

FALK.

Daring man!

LIND.

I have my round of visits to the clan;
Time will run anyhow to waste in this;

But any further dislocation of
My study-plan I strongly disapprove.

FALK.

A week ago, however, you were bent
On going out into God's world with song.

LIND.

Yes, but I thought the tour a little long;
The fourteen days might well be better spent.

FALK

Nay, but you had another argument
For staying; how the lovely dale for you
Was mountain air and winged warble too.

LIND.

Yes, to be sure, this air is unalloyed;
But all its benefits may be enjoyed
Over one's book without the slightest bar.

FALK.

But it was just t h e B o o k which failed, you see,
As Jacob's ladder—

LIND.

How perverse you are:
That is what people say when they are f r e e—

FALK.

[*Looking at him and folding his hands in silent amazement.*]
Thou also, Brutus!

LIND.

[*With a shade of confusion and annoyance.*]

Pray remember, do!
That I have other duties now than you;
I have my *fiancée*. Every plighted pair,
Those of prolonged experience not excepted,—
Whose evidence you would not wish rejected;—
Will tell you, that if two are bound to fare
Through life together, they must—

FALK.

Prithee spare
The comment; who supplied it?

LIND.

Well, we'll say
Stiver, he's honest surely; and Miss Jay,
Who has such very great experience here,
She says—

FALK.

Well, but the Parson and his—dear?

LIND.

Yes, they're remarkable. There broods above
Them such placidity, such quietude,—
Conceive, she can't remember being wooed,
Has quite forgotten what is meant by love.

FALK.

Ah yes, when one has slumber'd over long,
The birds of memory refuse their song.

[*Laying his hand on* LIND'S *shoulder, with an ironical look.*

You, Lind, slept sound last night, I guarantee?

LIND.

And long. I went to bed in such depression,
And yet with such a fever in my brain,
I almost doubted if I could be sane.

FALK.

Ah yes, a sort of witchery, you see.

LIND.

Thank God I woke in perfect self-possession.

[*During the foregoing scene* STRAWMAN *has been seen from time to time walking in the background in lively conversation with* ANNA; MRS. STRAWMAN *and the children follow.* MISS JAY *now appears also, and with her* MRS. HALM *and other ladies.*

MISS JAY.

[*Before she enters.*]

Ah, Mr. Lind.

LIND.

[*To* FALK.]

They're after me again!
Come, let us go.

MISS JAY.

Nay, nay, you must remain,
Let us make speedy end of the division
That has crept in between your love and you.

LIND.

Are we divided?

MISS JAY.

[*Pointing to* ANNA, *who is standing further off in the garden.*]

Gather the decision
From yon red eyes. The foreign mission drew
Those tears.

LIND.

But heavens, she was glad to go—

MISS JAY.

[*Scoffing.*]

Yes, to be sure, one would imagine so!
No, my dear Lind, you'll take another view
When you have heard the whole affair discussed.

LIND.

But then this warfare for the faith, you know,
Is my most cherished dream!

MISS JAY.

O who would build
On dreaming in this century of light?
Why, Stiver had a dream the other night;
There came a letter singularly sealed—

MRS. STRAWMAN.

It's t r e a s u r e such a dream prognosticates.

MISS JAY.

[*Nodding.*]

Yes, and next day they sued him for the rates.

[*The ladies make a circle round* LIND *and go in conversation with him into the garden.*

STRAWMAN.

[*Continuing, to* ANNA, *who faintly tries to escape.*]

From these considerations, daughter mine,
From these considerations, buttressed all
With reason, morals, and the Word Divine,
You now perceive that to desert your Call
Were absolutely inexcusable.

ANNA.

[*Half crying.*]

Oh! I'm so young—

STRAWMAN.

And it is natural,
I own, that one should hesitate to thrid
These perils, dare the snares that there lie hid;
From doubt's entanglement you must break free,—
Be of good cheer and follow Moll and me!

MRS. STRAWMAN.

Yes, your dear mother tells me that I too
Was just as inconsolable as you
When we received our Call—

STRAWMAN.

And for like cause—
The fascination of the town—it was;
But when a little money had come in,
And the first pairs of infants, twin by twin,
She quite got over it.

FALK.

[*Sotto voce to* STRAWMAN.]

Bravo, you able
Persuader.

STRAWMAN.

[*Nodding to him and turning again to* ANNA.]

Now you've promised me, be stable.
Shall man renounce his work? Falk says the Call
Is not so very slender after all.
Did you not, Falk?

FALK.

Nay, pastor—

STRAWMAN.

To be sure—!
[*To* ANNA.
Of something then at least you are secure.
What's gained by giving up, if that is so?
Look back into the ages long ago,
See, Adam, Eve—the Ark, see, pair by pair,
Birds in the field—the lilies in the air,
The little birds—the little birds—the fishes—
[*Continues in a lower tone, as he withdraws with* ANNA.

[MISS JAY *and the* AUNTS *return with* LIND.]

FALK.

Hurrah! Here come the veterans in array;
The old guard charging to retrieve the day!

MISS JAY.

Ah, in exact accordance with our wishes! [*Aside.*

We h a v e him, Falk!—Now let us tackle h e r!
[*Approaches* ANNA.

STRAWMAN.

[*With a deprecating motion.*]

She needs no secular solicitation;
The Spirit has spoken, what can Earth bestead—?
[*Modestly.*
If in some small degree my words have sped,
Power was vouchsafed me—!

MRS. HALM.

Come, no more evasion,
Bring them together!

AUNTS.

[*With emotion.*]

Ah, how exquisite!

STRAWMAN.

Yes, can there be a heart so dull and dead
As not to be entranced at such a sight!
It is so thrilling and so penetrating,
So lacerating, so exhilarating,
To see an innocent babe devoutly lay
Its offering on Duty's altar.

MRS. HALM.

Nay,
Her family have also done their part.

MISS JAY.

I and the Aunts—I should imagine so.
You, Lind, may have the key to Anna's heart,
[*Presses his hand.*
But we possess a picklock, you must know,
Able to open where the key avails not.
And if in years to come, cares throng and thwart,
Only apply to us, our friendship fails not.

MRS. HALM.

Yes, we shall hover round you all your life,—

MISS JAY.

And shield you from the fiend of wedded strife.

STRAWMAN.

Enchanting group! Love, friendship, hour of gladness,
Yet so pathetically touched with sadness.
[*Turning to* LIND.
But now, young man, pray make an end of this.
[*Leading* ANNA *to him.*
Take thy betrothed—receive her—with a kiss!

LIND.

[*Giving his hand to* ANNA.]

I stay at home!

ANNA.

[*At the same moment.*]

I go with you!

ANNA.

[*Amazed.*]

You stay?

LIND.

[*Equally so.*]

You go with me?

ANNA.

[*With a helpless glance at the company.*]

Why, then, we are divided as before!

LIND.

What's this?

THE LADIES.

What now?

MISS JAY.

[*Excitedly.*]

Our wills are all at war—

STRAWMAN

She gave her solemn word to cross the sea
With him!

MISS JAY.

And he gave his to stay ashore
With her!

FALK.

[*Laughing.*]

They both complied; what would you more!

STRAWMAN.

These complications are too much for me.
[*Goes towards the background.*

AUNTS

[*To one another.*]

How in the world came they to disagree?

MRS. HALM.

[*To* GULDSTAD *and* STIVER, *who have been walking in the garden and now approach.*]

The spirit of discord's in possession here.
[*Talks aside to them.*

MRS. STRAWMAN.

[*To* MISS JAY, *noticing that the table is being laid.*]

There comes the tea.

MISS JAY.

[*Curtly.*]

Thank heaven.

FALK.

Hurrah! a cheer
For love and friendship, maiden aunts and tea!

STIVER.

But if the case stands thus, the whole proceeding
May easily be ended with a laugh;
All turns upon a single paragraph,
Which bids the wife attend the spouse. No pleading
Can wrest an ordinance so clearly stated—

MISS JAY.

Doubtless, but does that help us to agree?

STRAWMAN.

She must obey a law that heaven dictated.

STIVER.

But Lind can circumvent that law, you see.
[*To* LIND.
Put off your journey, and then—budge no jot.

AUNTS.

[*Delighted.*]

Yes, that's the way.

MRS. HALM.

Agreed!

MISS JAY.

That cuts the knot.

[SVANHILD *and the maids have meantime laid the tea-table beside the verandah steps. At* MRS. HALM'S *invitation the ladies sit down. The rest of the company take their places, partly on the verandah and in the summer-house, partly in the garden.* FALK *sits on the verandah. During the following scene they drink tea.*

MRS. HALM.

[*Smiling.*]

And so our little storm is overblown.
Such summer showers do good when they are gone;

The sunshine greets us with a double boon,
And promises a cloudless afternoon.

MISS JAY.

Ah yes, Love's blossom without rainy skies
Would never thrive according to our wishes.

FALK.

In dry land set it, and it forthwith dies;
For in so far the flowers are like the fishes—

SVANHILD.

Nay, for Love lives, you know, upon the air—

MISS JAY.

Which is the death of fishes—

FALK.

So I say.

MISS JAY.

Aha, we've put a bridle on you there!

MRS. STRAWMAN.

The tea is good, one knows by the bouquet.

FALK.

Well, let us keep the simile you chose.
Love is a flower; for if heaven's blessed rain
Fall short, it all but pines to death— [*Pauses.*

MISS JAY.

What then?

FALK.

[*With a gallant bow.*]

Then come the aunts with the reviving hose.—
But poets have this simile employed,
And men for scores of centuries enjoyed,—
Yet hardly one its secret sense has hit;
For flowers are manifold and infinite.
Say, then, what flower is love? Name me, who knows,
The flower most like it?

MISS JAY.

Why, it is the rose;
Good gracious, that's exceedingly well known;—
Love, all agree, lends life a rosy tone.

A YOUNG LADY.

It is the snowdrop; growing, snow enfurled;
Till it peer forth, undreamt of by the world.

AN AUNT.

It is the dandelion,—made robust
By dint of human heel and horse hoof thrust;
Nay, shooting forth afresh when it is smitten,
As Pedersen so charmingly has written.

LIND.

It is the bluebell,—ringing in for all
Young hearts life's joyous Whitsun festival

MRS. HALM.

No, 'tis an evergreen,—as fresh and gay
In desolate December as in May.

GULDSTAD.

No, Iceland moss, dry gathered,—far the best
Cure for young ladies with a wounded breast.

A GENTLEMAN.

No, the wild chestnut tree,—in high repute
For household fuel, but with a bitter fruit.

SVANHILD.

No, a camelia; at our balls, 'tis said,
The chief adornment of a lady's head.

MRS. STRAWMAN.

No, it is like a flower, O such a bright one;—
Stay now—a blue one, no, it was a white one—
What i s its name—? Dear me—the one I met—;
Well it is singular how I forget!

STIVER.

None of these flower similitudes will run.
The flowerp o t is a likelier candidate.
There's only room in it, at once, for o n e;
But by progressive stages it holds e i g h t.

STRAWMAN.

[*With his little girls round him.*]

No, love's a pear tree; in the spring like snow
With myriad blossoms, which in summer grow
To pearlets; in the parent's sap each shares;—
And with God's help they'll all alike prove pears.

FALK.

So many heads, so many sentences!
No, you all grope and blunder off the line.
Each simile's at fault; I'll tell you mine;—
You're free to turn and wrest it as you please.
[*Rises as if to make a speech.*
In the remotest east there grows a plant;[1]
And the sun's cousin's garden is its haunt—

THE LADIES.

Ah, it's the tea-plant!

FALK.

Yes.

MRS. STRAWMAN.

His voice is so
Like Strawman's when he—

STRAWMAN.

Don't disturb his flow.

FALK.

It has its home in fabled lands serene;
Thousands of miles of desert lie between;—
Fill up, Lind!—So.—Now in a tea-oration,
I'll show of tea and Love the true relation.
[*The guests cluster round him.*
It has its home in the romantic land;
Alas, Love's home is also in Romance,
Only the Sun's descendants understand
The herb's right cultivation and advance.

[1] See Notes, page 483.

With Love it is not otherwise than so.
Blood of the Sun along the veins must flow
If Love indeed therein is to strike root,
And burgeon into blossom, into fruit.

MISS JAY.

But China is an ancient land; you hold
In consequence that tea is very old—

STRAWMAN.

Past question antecedent to Jerusalem.

FALK.

Yes, 'twas already famous when Methusalem
His picture-books and rattles tore and flung—

MISS JAY.

[*Triumphantly.*]

And Love is in its very nature young!
To find a likeness there is pretty bold.

FALK.

No; Love, in truth, is also very old;
That principle we here no more dispute
Than do the folks of Rio or Beyrout.
Nay, there are those from Cayenne to Caithness,
Who stand upon its everlastingness;—
Well, that may be a slight exaggeration,
But old it is beyond all estimation.

MISS JAY.

But Love is all alike; whereas we see
Both good and bad and middling kinds of tea!

MRS. STRAWMAN.

Yes, they sell tea of many qualities.

ANNA.

The green spring shoots I count the very first—

SVANHILD.

Those serve to quench celestial daughters' thirst.

A YOUNG LADY.

Witching as ether fumes they say it is—

ANOTHER.

Balmy as lotus, sweet as almond, clear—

GULDSTAD.

That's not an article we deal in here.

FALK.

[*Who has meanwhile come down from the verandah.*]

Ah, ladies, every mortal has a small
Private celestial empire in his heart.
There bud such shoots in thousands, kept apart
By Shyness's soon shatter'd Chinese Wall.
But in her dim fantastic temple bower
The little Chinese puppet sits and sighs,
A dream of far-off wonders in her eyes—
And in her hand a golden tulip flower.
For h e r the tender firstling tendrils grew;—
Rich crop or meagre, what is that to you?
Instead of it we get an after crop
They kick the tree for, dust and stalk and stem,—
As hemp to silk beside what goes to them—

GULDSTAD.

That is the black tea.

FALK.

[*Nodding.*]

That's what fills the shop.

A GENTLEMAN.

There's beef tea too, that Holberg says a word of—

MISS JAY.

[*Sharply.*]

To modern taste entirely out of date.

FALK.

And a b e e f l o v e has equally been heard of,
Wont—in romances—to browbeat its mate,
And still they say its trace may be detected
Amongst the henpecked of the married state.
In short there's likeness where 'twas least expected.
So, as you know, an ancient proverb tells,
That something ever passes from the tea
Of the bouquet that lodges in its cells,
If it be carried hither over sea.
It must across the desert and the hills,—
Pay toll to Cossack and to Russian tills;—
It gets their stamp and licence, that's enough,
We buy it as the true and genuine stuff.
But has not Love the self-same path to fare?
Across Life's desert? How the world would rave
And shriek if you or I should boldly bear

Our Love by way of Freedom's ocean wave!
"Good heavens, his moral savour's passed away,
"And quite dispersed Legality's bouquet!"—

STRAWMAN.

[*Rising.*]

Yes, happily,—in every moral land
Such wares continue to be contraband!

FALK.

Yes, to pass current here, Love must have cross'd
The great Siberian waste of regulations,
Fann'd by no breath of ocean to its cost;
It must produce official attestations
From friends and kindred, devils of relations,
From church curators, organist and clerk,
And other fine folks—over and above
The primal licence which God gave to Love.—
And then the last great point of likeness;—mark
How heavily the hand of culture weighs
Upon that far Celestial domain;
Its power is shatter'd, and its wall decays,
The last true Mandarin's strangled; hands profane
Already are put forth to share the spoil;
Soon the Sun's realm will be a legend vain,
An idle tale incredible to sense;
The world is gray in gray—we've flung the soil
On buried Faery,—we have made her mound.
But if we have,—then where can Love be found?
Alas, Love also is departed hence! [*Lifts his cup.*
Well let him go, since so the times decree;—
A health to Amor, late of Earth,—in tea!

[*He drains his cup; indignant murmurs amongst the company.*

MISS JAY.

A very odd expression! "Dead" indeed!

THE LADIES.

To say that Love is dead—!

STRAWMAN.

Why, here you see
Him sitting, rosy, round and sound, at tea,
In all conditions! Here in her sable weed
The widow—

MISS JAY.

Here a couple, true and tried,—

STIVER.

With many ample pledges fortified.

GULDSTAD.

Then Love's light cavalry, of maid and man,
The plighted pairs in order—

STRAWMAN.

In the van
The veterans, whose troth has laughed to scorn
The tooth of Time—

MISS JAY.

[*Hastily interrupting.*]

And then the babes new-born—
The little novices of yester-morn—

STRAWMAN.

Spring, summer, autumn, winter, in a word,
Are here; the truth is patent, past all doubt,
It can be clutched and handled, seen and heard,—

FALK.

What then?

MISS JAY.

And yet you want to thrust it out!

FALK.

Madam, you quite mistake. In all I spoke
I cast no doubt on anything you claim;
But I would fain remind you that, from smoke,
We cannot logically argue flame.
That men are married, and have children, I
Have no desire whatever to deny;
Nor do I dream of doubting that such things
Are in the world as troth and wedding-rings;
That billets-doux some tender hands indite
And seal with pairs of turtle doves that—fight;
That sweethearts swarm in cottage and in hall,
That chocolate rewards the wedding-call;
That usage and convention have decreed,
In every point, how "Lovers" shall proceed:—
But, heavens! We've majors also by the score,
Arsenals heaped with muniments of war,
With spurs and howitzers and drums and shot,
But what does that permit us to infer?
That we have men who dangle swords, but not
That they will wield the weapons that they wear.
Tho' all the plain with gleaming tents you crowd,
Does that make heroes of the men they shroud?

STRAWMAN.

Well, all in moderation; I must own,
It is not quite conducive to the truth
That we should paint the enamourment of youth
So bright, as if—ahem—it stood alone.
Love-making still a frail foundation is.
Only the snuggery of wedded bliss
Provides a rock where Love may builded be
In unassailable security.

MISS JAY.

There I entirely differ. In my view,
A free accord of lovers, heart with heart,
Who hold together, having leave to part,
Gives the best warrant that their love is true.

ANNA.

[*Warmly.*]

O no—Love's bond when it is fresh and young
Is of a stuff more precious and more strong.

LIND.

[*Thoughtfully.*]

Possibly the ideal flower may blow,
Even as that snowdrop,—hidden by the snow.

FALK.

[*With a sudden outburst.*]

You fallen Adam! There a heart was cleft
With longing for the Eden it has left!

LIND.

What stuff!

MRS. HALM.

[*Offended, to* FALK, *rising.*]

'Tis not a very friendly act
To stir a quarrel where we've made a peace.
As for your friend's good fortune, be at ease—

SOME LADIES.

Nay that's assured—

OTHERS.

A very certain fact.

MRS. HALM.

The cooking-class at school, I must confess,
She did not take; but she shall learn it still.

MISS JAY.

With her own hands she's trimming her own dress.

AN AUNT.

[*Patting* ANNA'S *hand.*]

And growing exquisitely sensible.

FALK.

[*Laughing aloud.*]

O parody of sense, that rives and rends
In maniac dance upon the lips of friends!
Was it good sense he wanted? Or a she-
Professor of the lore of Cookery?

A joyous son of springtime he came here,
For the wild rosebud on the bush he burned.
You reared the rosebud for him; he returned—
And for his rose found what? The hip!

MISS JAY.

[*Offended.*]

You jeer!

FALK.

A useful household condiment, heaven knows!
But yet the hip was not his bridal rose.

MRS. HALM.

O, if it is a ball-room queen he wants,
I'm very sorry; these are not their haunts.

FALK.

O yes, I know the pretty coquetry
They carry on with "Domesticity."
It is a suckling of the mighty Lie
That, like hop-tendrils, spreads itself on high.
I, madam, reverently bare my head
To the ball queen; a child of beauty she—
And the ideal's golden woof is spread
In ball-rooms, hardly in the nursery.

MRS. HALM.

[*With suppressed bitterness.*]

Your conduct, sir, is easily explained;
A plighted lover cannot be a friend;
That is the kernel of the whole affair;
I have a very large experience there.

FALK.

No doubt,—with seven nieces, each a wife—

MRS. HALM.

And each a happy wife—

FALK.

[*With emphasis.*]

Ah, do we know?

GULDSTAD.

How!

MISS JAY.

Mr. Falk!

LIND.

Are you resolved to sow
Dissension?

FALK.

[*Vehemently.*]

Yes, war, discord, turmoil, strife!

STIVER.

What you, a lay, profane outsider here!

FALK.

No matter, still the battle-flag I'll rear!
Yes, it is war I mean with nail and tooth
Against the Lie with the tenacious root,
The lie that you have fostered into fruit,
For all its strutting in the guise of truth!

STIVER.

Against these groundless charges I protest,
Reserving right of action—

MISS JAY.

Do be still!

FALK.

So then it is Love's ever-running rill
That tells the widow what she once possess'd,—
That very Love that, in the days gone by,
Out of her language blotted "moan" and "sigh"!
So then it is Love's brimming tide that rolls
Along the placid veins of wedded souls,—
That very Love that faced the iron sleet,
Trampling inane Convention under feet,
And scoffing at the impotent discreet!
So then it is Love's beauty-kindled flame
That keeps the plighted from the taint of time
Year after year! Ah yes, the very same
That made our young bureaucrat blaze in ryhme!
So it is Love's young bliss that will not brave
The voyage over vaulted Ocean's wave,
But asks a sacrifice when, like the sun,
Its face should fill with glory, m a k i n g one!
Ah no, you vulgar prophets of the Lie,
Give things the names we ought to know them by;
Call widows' passion—wanting what they miss,
And wedlock's h a b i t —call it what it is!

STRAWMAN.

Young man, this insolence has gone too far!
In every word there's scoffing and defiance.

[*Goes close up to* FALK.

Now I'll gird up my aged loins to war
For hallowed custom against modern science!

FALK.

I go to battle as it were a feast!

STRAWMAN

Good! For your bullets I will be a beacon:—
[*Nearer.*
A wedded pair is holy, like a priest—

STIVER.

[*At* FALK'S *other side.*]

And a betrothed—

FALK.

Half-holy, like the deacon.

STRAWMAN.

Behold these children;—see,—this little throng!
Io triumphe may for them be sung!
How was it possible—how practicable—;
The words of truth are strong, inexorable;—
He has no hearing whom they cannot move.
See,—every one of them's a child of Love—!
[*Stops in confusion.*
That is—you understand—I would have said—!

MISS JAY.

[*Fanning herself with her handkerchief.*]

This is a very mystical oration!

FALK.

There you yourself provide the demonstration,—
A good old Norse one, sound, true-born, home-bred.
You draw distinction between wedded pledges
And those of Love: your Logic's without flaw.
They are distinguished just as roast from raw,
As hothouse bloom from wilding of the hedges!
Love is with us a science and an art;
It long since ceased to animate the heart.
Love is with us a trade, a special line
Of business, with its union, code and sign;
It is a guild of married folks and plighted,
Past-masters with apprentices united;
For they cohere compact as jelly-fishes,
A singing-club their single want and wish is—

GULDSTAD.

And a gazette!

FALK.

A good suggestion, yes!
We too must have our organ in the press,
Like ladies, athletes, boys, and devotees.
Don't ask the price at present, if you please.
There I'll parade each amatory fetter
That John and Thomas to our town unites,
There publish every pink and perfumed letter
That William to his tender Jane indites;
There you shall read, among "Distressing Scenes"—
Instead of murders and burnt crinolines,
The broken matches that the week's afforded;
There under "goods for sale" you'll find what firms
Will furnish cast-off rings on easy terms;
There double, treble births will be recorded;

No wedding, but our rallying rub-a-dub
Shall drum to the performance all the club;
No suit rejected, but we'll set it down,
In letters large, with other news of weight
Thus: "Amor-Moloch, we regret to state,
Has claimed another victim in our town."
You'll see, we'll catch subscribers: once in sight
Of the propitious season when they bite,
By way of throwing them the bait they'll brook
I'll stick a nice young man upon my hook.
Yes, you will see me battle for our cause,
With tiger's, nay with editorial, claws
Rending them—

GULDSTAD.

And the paper's name will be—?

FALK.

Amor's Norse Chronicle of Archery.

STIVER.

[*Going nearer.*]

You're not in earnest, you will never stake
Your name and fame for such a fancy's sake!

FALK.

I'm in grim earnest. We are often told
Men cannot live on love; I'll show that this
Is an untenable hypothesis;
For Love will prove to be a mine of gold:
Particularly if Miss Jay, perhaps,
Will Mr. Strawman's "Life's Romance" unfold,
As appetising feuilleton, in scraps.

STRAWMAN.

[*In terror.*]

Merciful heaven! My "life's romance"! What, what!
When was my life romantic, if you please?

MISS JAY.

I never said so.

STIVER.

Witness disagrees.

STRAWMAN.

That I have ever swerved a single jot
From social prescript,—is a monstrous lie.

FALK.

Good.

[*Clapping* STIVER *on the shoulder.*

Here's a friend who will not be put by.
We'll start with Stiver's lyric ecstasies.

STIVER.

[*After a glance of horror at* STRAWMAN.]

Are you quite mad! Nay then I must be heard!
You dare accuse me for a poet—

MISS JAY.

How—!

FALK.

Your office has averred it anyhow.

STIVER.

[*In towering anger.*]

Sir, by our office nothing is averred.

FALK.

Well, leave me then, you also: I have by me
One comrade yet whose loyalty will last.
"A true heart's story" Lind will not deny me,
Whose troth's too tender for the ocean blast,
Who for his mistress makes surrender of
His fellow-men—pure quintessence of Love!

MRS. HALM.

My patience, Mr. Falk, is now worn out.
The same abode no longer can receive us:—
I beg of you this very day to leave us—

FALK.

[*With a bow as* MRS. HALM *and the company withdraw.*]

That this would come I never had a doubt!

STRAWMAN.

Between us two there's battle to the death;
You've slandered me, my wife, my little flock,
From Mollie down to Millie, in one breath.
Crow on, crow on—Emancipation's cock,—
[*Goes in, followed by his wife and children.*

FALK.

And go you on observing Peter's faith
To Love your lord—who, thanks to your advice,
Was thrice denied before the cock crew thrice!

MISS JAY.

[*Turning faint.*]

Attend me, Stiver! help me get unlaced
My corset—this way, this way—do make haste!

STIVER.

[*To* FALK, *as he withdraws with* MISS JAY *on his arm.*]

I here renounce your friendship.

LIND.

I likewise.

FALK.

[*Seriously.*]

You too, my Lind?

LIND.

Farewell.

FALK.

You were my nearest one—

LIND.

No help, it is the pleasure of my dearest one.

[*He goes in:* SVANHILD *has remained standing on the verandah steps.*

FALK.

So, now I've made a clearance, have free course
In all directions!

SVANHILD.

Falk, one word with you!

FALK.

[*Pointing politely to the house.*]

That way, Miss Halm;—that way, with all the force
Of aunts and inmates, Mrs. Halm withdrew.

SVANHILD.

[*Nearer to him.*]

Let them withdraw; their ways and mine divide;
I will not swell the number of their band.

FALK.

You'll stay?

SVANHILD.

If you make war on lies, I stand
A trusty armour-bearer by your side.

FALK.

You, Svanhild, you who—

SVANHILD.

I, who—yesterday—?
Were you yourself, Falk, yesterday the same?
You bade me be a sallow, for your play.

FALK.

And a sweet sallow sang me into shame.
No, you are right; I was a child to ask;
But you have fired me to a nobler task.
Right in the midst of men the Church is founded

Where Truth's appealing clarion must be sounded
We are not called, like demigods, to gaze on
The battle from the far-off mountain's crest,
But in our hearts to bear our fiery blazon,
An Olaf's cross upon a mailed breast,—
To look afar across the fields of flight,
Tho' pent within the mazes of its might,—
Beyond the mirk descry one glimmer still
Of glory—that's the Call we must fulfil.

SVANHILD.

And you'll fulfil it when you break from men,
Stand free, alone,—

FALK.

Did I frequent them t h e n ?
And there lies duty. No, that time's gone by,—
My solitary compact with the sky.
My four-wall-chamber poetry is done;
My verse shall live in forest and in field,
I'll fight under the splendour of the sun;—
I or the Lie—one of us two must yield!

SVANHILD.

Then forth with God from Verse to Derringdoe!
I did you wrong: you have a feeling heart;
Forgive me,—and as good friends let us part—

FALK.

Nay, in my future there is room for two!
We part not. Svanhild, if you dare decide,
We'll battle on together side by side.

SVANHILD.

We battle?

FALK.

See, I have no friend, no mate,
By all abandoned, I make war on all:
At me they aim the piercing shafts of hate;
Say, do you dare with me to stand or fall?
Henceforth along the beaten walks I'll move
Heedful of each constraining etiquette;
Spread, like the rest of men, my board, and set
The ring upon the finger of my love!
[*Takes a ring from his finger and holds it up.*

SVANHILD.

[*In breathless suspense.*]

You mean that?

FALK.

Yes, by us the world shall see,
Love has an everlasting energy,
That suffers not its splendour to take hurt
From the day's dust, the common highway's dirt.
Last night I showed you the ideal flame,
Beaconing from a dizzy mountain's brow.
You shuddered, for you were a woman,—now
I show you woman's veritable aim;—
A soul like yours, what it has vowed, will keep.
You see the abyss before you.—Svanhild, leap!

SVANHILD.

[*Almost inaudibly.*]

If we should fail—!

FALK.

[*Exulting.*]

No, in your eyes I see
A gleam that surely prophesies our winning!

SVANHILD.

Then take me as I am, take all of me!
Now buds the young leaf; now my spring's beginning!

[*She flings herself boldly into his arms as the curtain falls.*

ACT THIRD

Evening. Bright moonlight. Coloured lanterns are hung about the trees. In the background are covered tables with bottles, glasses, biscuits, etc. From the house, which is lighted up from top to bottom, subdued music and singing are heard during the following scene. SVANHILD *stands on the verandah.* FALK *comes from the right with some books and a portfolio under his arm. The* PORTER *follows with a portmanteau and a knapsack.*

FALK.

That's all, then?

PORTER.

Yes, sir, all is in the pack,
But just a satchel, and the paletot.

FALK.

Good; when I go, I'll take them on my back.
Now off. See, this is the portfolio.

PORTER.

It's locked, I see.

FALK.

Locked, Peter.

PORTER.

Good, sir.

FALK.

Pray,
Make haste and burn it.

PORTER.

Burn it?

FALK.

Yes, to ash—
[*Smiling.*
With every draft upon poetic cash;
As for the books, you're welcome to them.

PORTER.

Nay,
Such payment is above a poor man's earning.
But, sir, I'm thinking, if you can bestow
Your books, you must have done with all your learning?

FALK.

Whatever can be learnt from books I know,
And rather more.

PORTER.

More? Nay, that's hard, I doubt!

FALK.

Well, now be off; the carriers wait without.
Just help them load the barrow ere you go.
[*The* PORTER *goes out to the left.*

FALK.

[*Approaching* SVANHILD, *who comes to meet him.*]

One moment's ours, my Svanhild, in the light
Of God and of the lustrous summer night.
How the stars glitter thro' the leafage, see,
Like bright fruit hanging on the great world-tree.
Now slavery's last manacle I slip,
Now for the last time feel the wealing whip;
Like Israel at the Passover I stand,
Loins girded for the desert, staff in hand.
Dull generation, from whose sight is hid
The Promised Land beyond that desert flight,
Thrall tricked with knighthood, never the more knight,
Tomb thyself kinglike in the Pyramid,—
I cross the barren desert to be free.
My ship strides on despite an ebbing sea;
But there the Legion Lie shall find its doom,
And glut one deep, dark, hollow-vaulted tomb.
[*A short pause; he looks at her and takes her hand.*
You are so still!

SVANHILD.

So happy! Suffer me,
O suffer me in silence still to dream.
Speak you for me; my budding thoughts, grown strong,
One after one will burgeon into song,
Like lilies in the bosom of the stream.

FALK.

O say it once again, in truth's pure tone
Beyond the fear of doubt, that thou art mine!
O say it, Svanhild, say—

SVANHILD.

[*Throwing herself on his neck.*]

Yes, I am thine!

FALK.

Thou singing-bird God sent me for my own!

SVANHILD.

Homeless within my mother's house I dwelt,
Lonely in all I thought, in all I felt,
A guest unbidden at the feast of mirth,—
Accounted nothing—less than nothing—worth.
Then you appeared! For the first time I heard
My own thought uttered in another's word;
To my lame visions you gave wings and feet—
You young unmasker of the Obsolete!
Half with your caustic keenness you alarmed me,
Half with your radiant eloquence you charmed me,
As sea-girt forests summon with their spell
The sea their flinty beaches still repel.
Now I have read the bottom of your soul,
Now you have won me, undivided, whole;
Dear forest, where my tossing billows beat,
My tide's at flood and never will retreat!

FALK.

And I thank God that in the bath of Pain
He purged my love. What strong compulsion drew
Me on I knew not, till I saw in you
The treasure I had blindly sought in vain.
I praise Him, who our love has lifted thus
To noble rank by sorrow,—licensed us

To a triumphal progress, bade us sweep
Thro' fen and forest to our castle-keep,
A noble pair, astride on Pegasus!

SVANHILD.

[*Pointing to the house.*]

The whole house, see, is making feast to-night.
There, in their honour, every room's alight,
There cheerful talk and joyous song ring out;
On the highroad no passer-by will doubt
That men are happy where they are so gay.
[*With compassion.*
Poor sister!—happy in the great world's way!

FALK.

"Poor" sister, say you?

SVANHILD.

Has she not divided
With kith and kin the treasure of her soul,
Her capital to fifty hands confided,
So that not one is debtor for the whole?
From no one has she all things to receive,
For no one has she utterly to live.
O beside my wealth hers is little worth;
I have but one possession upon earth.
My heart was lordless when with trumpet blare
And multitudinous song you came, its king,
The banners of my thought your ensign bear,
You fill my soul with glory, like the spring.
Yes, I must needs thank God, when it is past,
That I was lonely till I found out thee,—
That I lay dead until the trumpet blast
Waken'd me from the world's frivolity.

FALK.

Yes we, who have no friends on earth, we twain
Own the true wealth, the golden fortune,—we
Who stand without, beside the starlit sea,
And watch the indoor revel thro' the pane.
Let the lamp glitter and the song resound,
Let the dance madly eddy round and round;—
Look up, my Svanhild, into yon deep blue,—
There glitter little lamps in thousands, too—

SVANHILD.

And hark, beloved, thro' the limes there floats
This balmy eve a chorus of sweet notes—

FALK.

It is for us that fretted vault's aglow—

SVANHILD.

It is for us the vale is loud below!

FALK.

I feel myself like God's lost prodigal;
I left Him for the world's delusive charms.
With mild reproof He wooed me to His arms;
And when I come, He lights the vaulted hall,
Prepares a banquet for the son restored,
And makes His noblest creature my reward.
From this time forth I'll never leave that Light,—
But stand its armed defender in the fight;
Nothing shall part us, and our life shall prove
A song of glory to triumphant love!

SVANHILD.

And see how easy triumph is for two,
When he's a man—

FALK.

She, woman thro' and thro';—
It is impossible for such to fall!

SVANHILD.

Then up, and to the war with want and sorrow;
This very hour I will declare it all!

[*Pointing to* FALK'S *ring on her finger*

FALK.

[*Hastily.*]

No, Svanhild, not to-night, wait till to-morrow!
To-night we gather our young love's red rose;
'Twere sacrilege to smirch it with the prose
Of common day.

[*The door into the garden-room opens.*

Your mother's coming! Hide!
No eye this night shall see thee as my bride!

[*They go out among the trees by the summer-house.* MRS. HALM *and* GULDSTAD *come out on the balcony.*

MRS. HALM.

He's really going?

GULDSTAD.

Seems so, I admit.

STIVER.

[*Coming.*]

He's going, madam!

MRS. HALM.

We're aware of it!

STIVER.

A most unfortunate punctilio.
He'll keep his word; his stubbornness I know.
In the Gazette he'll put us all by name;
My love will figure under leaded headings,
With jilts, and twins, and countermanded weddings.
Listen; I tell you, if it weren't for shame,
I would propose an armistice, a truce—

MRS. HALM.

You think he would be willing?

STIVER.

I deduce
The fact from certain signs, which indicate
That his tall talk about his Amor's News
Was uttered in a far from sober state.
One proof especially, if not transcendent,
Yet tells most heavily against defendant:
It has been clearly proved that after dinner
To his and Lind's joint chamber he withdrew,
And there displayed such singular demeanour
As leaves no question—

GULDSTAD.

[*Sees a glimpse of* FALK *and* SVANHILD, *who separate,* FALK *going to the background;* SVANHILD *remains standing hidden by the summer-house.*]

Hold, we have the clue!
Madam, one word!—Falk does not mean to go,
Or if he does, he means it as a friend.

STIVER.

How, you believe then—?

MRS. HALM.

What do you intend?

GULDSTAD.

With the least possible delay I'll show
That matters move precisely as you would.
Merely a word in private—

MRS. HALM.

Very good.

[*They go together into the garden and are seen from time to time in lively conversation.*

STIVER.

[*Descending into the garden discovers* FALK, *who is standing by the water and gazing over it.*]

These poets are mere men of vengeance, we
State servants understand diplomacy.
I need to labour for myself—

[*Seeing* STRAWMAN, *who enters from the garden-room.*

Well met!

STRAWMAN.

[*On the verandah.*]

He's really leaving!

[*Going down to* STIVER.

Ah, my dear sir, let
Me beg you just a moment to go in
And hold my wife—

STIVER.

I—hold her, sir?

STRAWMAN.

I mean
In talk. The little ones and we are so
Unused to be divided, there is no
Escaping—

[*His wife and children appear in the door.*

Ha! already on my trail.

MRS. STRAWMAN.

Where are you, Strawman?

STRAWMAN.

[*Aside to* STIVER.]

Do invent some tale,
Something amusing—something to beguile!

STIVER.

[*Going on to the verandah.*]

Pray, madam, have you read the official charge?
A masterpiece of literary style.

[*Takes a book from his pocket.*

Which I shall now proceed to cite at large.

[*Ushers her politely into the room, and follows himself.* FALK *comes forward; he and* STRAWMAN *meet; they regard one another a moment in silence.*

STRAWMAN.

Well?

FALK.

Well?

STRAWMAN.

Falk!

FALK.

Pastor!

STRAWMAN.

Are you less
Intractable than when we parted?

FALK

Nay,
I go my own inexorable way—

STRAWMAN.

Even tho' you crush another's happiness?

FALK.

I plant the flower of knowledge in its place.
[*Smiling.*
If, by the way, you have not ceased to think
Of the Gazette—

STRAWMAN.

Ah, that was all a joke?

FALK.

Yes, pluck up courage, that will turn to smoke;
I break the ice in action, not in ink.

STRAWMAN.

But even though you spare me, sure enough
There's one who won't so lightly let me off;
He has the advantage, and he won't forego it,
That lawyer's clerk—and 'tis to you I owe it;
You raked the ashes of our faded flames,
And you may take your oath he won't be still
If once I mutter but a syllable
Against the brazen bluster of his claims.
These civil-service gentlemen, they say,
Are very potent in the press to-day.
A trumpery paragraph can lay me low,
Once printed in that Samson-like Gazette
That with the jaw of asses fells its foe,
And runs away with tackle and with net,
Especially towards the quarter day—

FALK.

[*Acquiescing.*]

Ah, were there scandal in the case, indeed—

STRAWMAN.

[*Despondently.*]

No matter. Read its columns with good heed,
You'll see me offered up to Vengeance.

FALK.

[*Whimsically.*]

Nay,
To retribution—well-earned punishment.
Thro' all our life there runs a Nemesis,
Which may delay, but never will relent,
And grants to none exception or release.
Who wrongs the Ideal? Straight there rushes in
The Press, its guardian with the Argus eye,
And the offender suffers for his sin.

STRAWMAN.

But in the name of heaven, what pledge have I
Given this "Ideal" that's ever on your tongue?
I'm married, have a family, twelve young
And helpless innocents to clothe and keep;
I have my daily calls on every side,
Churches remote and glebe and pasture wide,
Great herds of breeding cattle, ghostly sheep—
All to be watched and cared for, clipt and fed,
Grain to be winnowed, compost to be spread;—
Wanted all day in shippon and in stall,
What time have *I* to serve the "Ideal" withal?

FALK.

Then get you home with what dispatch you may,
Creep snugly in before the winter-cold;
Look, in young Norway dawns at last the day,
Thousand brave hearts are in its ranks enroll'd,
Its banners in the morning breezes play!

STRAWMAN.

And if, young man, I were to take my way
With bag and baggage home, with everything

That made me yesterday a little king,
Were mine the only *volte face* to-day?
Think you I carry back the wealth I brought?
[*As* FALK *is about to answer.*
Nay, listen, let me first explain my thought.
[*Coming nearer.*
Time was when I was young, like you, and played
Like you, the unconquerable Titan's part;
Year after year I toiled and moiled for bread,
Which hardens a man's hand, but not his heart.
For northern fells my lonely home surrounded,
And by my parish bounds my world was bounded.
My home—Ah, Falk, I wonder, do you know
What home is?

FALK.
[*Curtly.*]
I have never known.

STRAWMAN.
Just so.
That is a home, where five may dwell with ease,
Tho' two would be a crowd, if enemies.
That is a home, where all your thoughts play free
As boys and girls about their father's knee,
Where speech no sooner touches heart, than tongue
Darts back an answering harmony of song;
Where you may grow from flax-haired snowy-polled,
And not a soul take note that you grow old;
Where memories grow fairer as they fade,
Like far blue peaks beyond the forest glade.

FALK
[*With constrained sarcasm.*]
Come, you grow warm—

STRAWMAN.

Where you but jeered and flouted.
So utterly unlike God made us two!
I'm bare of that he lavished upon you.
But I have won the game where you were routed.
Seen from the clouds, full many a wayside grain
Of truth seems empty chaff and husks. You'd soar
To heaven, I scarcely reach the stable door,
One bird's an eagle born—

FALK.

And one a hen.

STRAWMAN.

Yes, laugh away, and say it be so, grant
I am a hen. There clusters to my cluck
A crowd of little chickens,—which you want!
And I've the hen's high spirit and her pluck,
And for my little ones forget myself.
You think me dull, I know it. Possibly
You pass a harsher judgment yet, decree
Me over covetous of worldly pelf.
Good, on that head we will not disagree.

[*Seizes* FALK'S *arm and continues in a low tone but with gathering vehemence.*

You're right, I'm dull and dense and grasping, yes;
But grasping for my God-given babes and wife,
And dense from struggling blindly for bare life,
And dull from sailing seas of loneliness.
Just when the pinnace of my youthful dream
Into the everlasting deep went down,
Another started from the ocean stream
Borne with a fair wind onward to life's crown.

For every dream that vanished in the wave,
For every buoyant plume that broke asunder,
God sent me in return a little Wonder,
And gratefully I took the good He gave.
For them I strove, for them amassed, annexed,—
For them, for them, explained the Holy text;
My clustering girls, my garden of delight!
On them you've poured the venom of your spite!
You've proved, with all the cunning of the schools,
My bliss was but the paradise of fools,
That all I took for earnest was a jest;—
Now I implore, give me my quiet breast
Again, the flawless peace of mind I had—

FALK.

Prove, in a word, your title to be glad?

STRAWMAN.

Yes, in my path you've cast the stone of doubt,
And nobody but you can cast it out.
Between my kin and me you've set a bar,—
Remove the bar, the strangling noose undo—

FALK.

You possibly believe I keep the glue
Of lies for Happiness's broken jar?

STRAWMAN.

I do believe, the faith your reasons tore
To shreds, your reasons may again restore;
The limb that you have shatter'd, you can set;
Reverse your judgment,—the whole truth unfold,
Restate the case—I'll fly my banner yet—

FALK.

[*Haughtily.*]

I stamp no copper Happiness as gold.

STRAWMAN.

[*Looking fixedly at him.*]

Remember then that, lately, one whose scent
For truth is of the keenest told us this:
[*With uplifted finger.*
"There runs through all our life a Nemesis,
Which may delay, but never will relent."
[*He goes towards the house.*

STIVER.

[*Coming out with glasses on, and an open book in his hand.*]

Pastor, you must come flying like the blast!
Your girls are sobbing—

THE CHILDREN.

[*In the doorway.*]

Pa!

STIVER.

And Madam waiting!
[STRAWMAN *goes in.*
This lady has no talent for debating.
[*Puts the book and glasses in his pocket, and approaches* FALK.
Falk!

FALK.

Yes!

STIVER.

I hope you've changed your mind at last?

FALK.

Why so?

STIVER.

For obvious reasons. To betray
Communications made in confidence,
Is conduct utterly without defence.
They must not pass the lips.

FALK.

No, I've heard say
It is at times a risky game to play.

STIVER.

The very devil!

FALK.

Only for the great.

STIVER.

[*Zealously.*]

No, no, for all us servants of the state.
Only imagine how my future chances
Would dwindle, if the governor once knew
I keep a Pegasus that neighs and prances
In office hours—and such an office, too!
From first to last, you know, in our profession,
The winged horse is viewed with reprobation:
But worst of all would be, if it got wind
That I against our primal law had sinn'd
By bringing secret matters to the light—

FALK.

That's penal, is it—such an oversight?

STIVER.

[*Mysteriously.*]

It can a servant of the state compel
To beg for his dismissal out of hand.
On us officials lies a strict command,
Even by the hearth to be inscrutable.

FALK.

O those despotical authorities,
Muzzling the—clerk that treadeth out the grain!

STIVER.

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*]

It is the law; to murmur is in vain.
Moreover, at a moment such as this,
When salary revision is in train,
It is not well to advertise one's views
Of office time's true function and right use.
That's why I beg you to be silent; look,
A word may forfeit my—

FALK.

Portfolio?

STIVER.

Officially it's called a transcript book;
A protocol's the clasp upon the veil of snow
That shrouds the modest breast of the Bureau.
What lies beneath you must not seek to know.

FALK.

And yet I only spoke at your desire;
You hinted at your literary crop.

STIVER.

How should I guess he'd grovel in the mire
So deep, this parson perch'd on fortune's top,
A man with snug appointments, children, wife,
And money to defy the ills of life?
If such a man prove such a Philistine,
What shall of us poor copyists be said?
Of me, who drive the quill and rule the line,
A man engaged and shortly to be wed,
With family in prospect—and so forth?
[*More vehemently.*
O, if I only had a well-lined berth,
I'd bind the armour'd helmet on my head,
And cry defiance to united earth!
And were I only unengaged like you,
Trust me, I'd break a road athwart the snow
Of Prose, and carry the Ideal through!

FALK.

To work then, man!

STIVER.

How?

FALK.

You may still do so!
Let the world's prudish owl unheeded flutter by;
Freedom converts the grub into a butterfly!

STIVER.

[*Stepping back.*]

You mean, to break the engagement—?

FALK.

That's my mind;—
The fruit is gone, why keep the empty rind?

STIVER.

Such a proposal's for a green young shoot,
Not for a man of judgment and repute.
I heed not what King Christian in his time
(The Fifth) laid down about engagements broken-off;
For that relationship is nowhere spoken of
In any rubric of the code of crime.
The act would not be criminal in name,
It would in no way violate the laws—

FALK.

Why there, you see then!

STIVER.

[*Firmly.*]

Yes, but all the same,—
I must reject all pleas in such a cause.
Staunch comrades we have been in times of dearth;
Of life's disport she asks but little share,
And I'm a homely fellow, long aware
God made me for the ledger and the hearth.
Let others emulate the eagle's flight,
Life in the lowly plains may be as bright.

What does his Excellency Goethe say
About the white and shining milky way?
Man may not there the milk of fortune skim,
Nor is the butter of it meant for him.

FALK.

Why, even were fortune-churning our life's goal,
The labour must be guided by the soul;—
Be citizens of the time that is—but then
Make the time worthy of the citizen.
In homely things lurks beauty, without doubt,
But watchful eye and brain must draw it out.
Not every man who loves the soil he turns
May therefore claim to be another Burns.

STIVER.

Then let us each our proper path pursue,
And part in peace; we shall not hamper you;
We keep the road, you hover in the sky,
There where we too once floated, she and I.
But work, not song, provides our daily bread,
And when a man's alive, his music's dead.
A young man's life's a lawsuit, and the most
Superfluous litigation in existence:
Withdraw, make terms, abandon all resistance:
Plead where and how you will, your suit is lost.

FALK.

[*Bold and confident, with a glance at the summer-house.*]

Nay, tho' I took it to the highest place,—
Judgment, I know, would be reversed by grace!
I know two hearts can live a life complete,

With hope still ardent, and with faith still sweet;
You preach the wretched gospel of the hour,
That the Ideal is secondary!

STIVER.

No!
It's primary: appointed, like the flower,
To generate the fruit, and then to go.

[*Indoors,* MISS JAY *plays and sings: "In the Gloaming."* STIVER *stands listening in silent emotion.*

With the same melody she calls me yet
Which thrilled me to the heart when first we met.

[*Lays his hand on* FALK'S *arm and gazes intently at him.*

Oft as she wakens those pathetic notes,
From the white keys reverberating floats
An echo of the "yes" that made her mine.
And when our passions shall one day decline,
To live again as friendship, to the last
That song shall link that present to this past.
And what tho' at the desk my back grow round,
And my day's work a battle for mere bread,
Yet joy will lead me homeward, where the dead
Enchantment will be born again in sound.
If one poor bit of evening we can claim,
I shall come off undamaged from the game!

[*He goes into the house.* FALK *turns towards the summer-house.* SVANHILD *comes out, she is pale and agitated. They gaze at each other in silence a moment, and fling themselves impetuously into each other's arms.*

FALK.

O, Svanhild, let us battle side by side!
Thou fresh glad blossom flowering by the tomb,—
See what the life is that they call youth's bloom!
There's coffin-stench of bridegroom and of bride;
There's coffin-stench wherever two go by
At the street corner, smiling outwardly,
With falsehood's reeking sepulchre beneath,
And in their blood the apathy of death.
And this they think is living! Heaven and earth,
Is such a load so many antics worth?
For such an end to haul up babes in shoals,
To pamper them with honesty and reason,
To feed them fat with faith one sorry season,
For service, after killing-day, as souls?

SVANHILD.

Falk, let us travel!

FALK.

Travel? Whither, then?
Is not the whole world everywhere the same?
And does not Truth's own mirror in its frame
Lie equally to all the sons of men?
No, we will stay and watch the merry game,
The conjurer's trick, the tragi-comedy
Of liars that are dupes of their own lie;
Stiver and Lind, the Parson and his dame,
See them,—prize oxen harness'd to love's yoke,
And yet at bottom very decent folk!
Each wears for others and himself a mask,
Yet one too innocent to take to task;
Each one, a stranded sailor on a wreck,
Counts himself happy as the gods in heaven;

Each his own hand from Paradise has driven,
Then, splash! into the sulphur to the neck!
But none has any inkling where he lies,
Each thinks himself a knight of Paradise,
And each sits smiling between howl and howl;
And if the Fiend come by with jeer and growl,
With horns, and hoofs, and things yet more abhorred,—
Then each man jogs the neighbour at his jowl:
"Off with your hat, man! See, there goes the Lord!"

SVANHILD.

[*After a brief, thoughtful silence.*]

How marvellous a love my steps has led
To this sweet trysting place! My life that sped
In frolic and fantastic visions gay,
Henceforth shall grow one ceaseless working day!
O God! I wandered groping,—all was dim:
Thou gavest me light—and I discovered h i m !

[*Gazing at* FALK *in love and wonder.*

Whence is that strength of thine, thou mighty tree
That stand'st unshaken in the wind-wrecked wood,
That stand'st alone, and yet canst shelter me—?

FALK.

God's truth, my Svanhild;—that gives fortitude.

SVANHILD.

[*With a shy glance towards the house.*]

They came like tempters, evilly inclined,
Each spokesman for his half of humankind,
One asking: How can true love reach its goal
When riches' leaden weight subdues the soul?

The other asking: How can true love speed
When life's a battle to the death with Need?
O horrible!—to bid the world receive
That teaching as the truth, and yet to live!

FALK.

How if 'twere meant for us?

SVANHILD.

For us?—What, then?
Can outward faith control the wills of men?
I have already said: if thou'lt stand fast,
I'll dare and suffer by thee to the last.
How light to listen to the gospel's voice,
To leave one's home behind, to weep, rejoice,
And take with God the husband of one's choice!

FALK.

[*Embracing her.*]

Come then, and blow thy worst, thou winter weather!
We stand unshaken, for we stand together!

[MRS. HALM *and* GULDSTAD *come in from the right in the background.*

GULDSTAD.

[*Aside.*]

Observe!

[FALK *and* SVANHILD *remain standing by the summer-house.*

MRS. HALM.

[*Surprised.*]

Together!

GULDSTAD.

Do you doubt it now?

MRS. HALM.

This is most singular.

GULDSTAD.

O, I've noted how
His work of late absorb'd his interest.

MRS. HALM.

[*To herself.*]

Who would have fancied Svanhild was so sly?

[*Vivaciously to* GULDSTAD.

But no—I can't think.

GULDSTAD.

Put it to the test.

MRS. HALM.

Now, on the spot?

GULDSTAD.

Yes, and decisively!

MRS. HALM.

[*Giving him her hand.*]

God's blessing with you!

GULDSTAD.

[*Gravely.*]

Thanks, it may bestead.

[*Comes to the front.*

MRS. HALM.

[*Looking back as she goes towards the house.*]
Whichever way it goes, my child is sped.
[*Goes in.*

GULDSTAD.

[*Approaching* FALK.]
It's late, I think?

FALK.

Ten minutes and I go.

GULDSTAD.

Sufficient for my purpose.

SVANHILD.

[*Going.*]
Farewell.

GULDSTAD.

No,
Remain.

SVANHILD.

Shall I?

GULDSTAD.

Until you've answered me.
It's time we squared accounts. It's time we three
Talked out for once together from the heart.

FALK.

[*Taken aback.*]
We three?

GULDSTAD.

Yes,—all disguises flung apart.

FALK.

[*Suppressing a smile.*]

O, at your service.

GULDSTAD.

Very good, then hear.
We've been acquainted now for half a year;
We've wrangled—

FALK.

Yes.

GULDSTAD.

We've been in constant feud;
We've changed hard blows enough. You fought—alone—
For a sublime ideal; I as one
Among the money-grubbing multitude.
And yet it seemed as if a chord united
Us two, as if a thousand thoughts that lay
Deep in my own youth's memory benighted
Had started at your bidding into day.
Yes, I amaze you. But this hair grey-sprinkled
Once fluttered brown in spring-time, and this brow,
Which daily occupation moistens now
With sweat of labour, was not always wrinkled.
Enough; I am a man of business, hence—

FALK.

[*With gentle sarcasm.*]

You are the type of practical good sense.

GULDSTAD.

And you are hope's own singer young and fain.
[*Stepping between them.*
Just therefore, Falk and Svanhild, I am here.
Now let us talk, then; for the hour is near
Which brings good hap or sorrow in its train.

FALK.

[*In suspense.*]

Speak, then!

GULDSTAD.

[*Smiling.*]

My ground is, as I said last night,
A kind of poetry—

FALK.

In practice.

GULDSTAD.

[*Nodding slowly.*]

Right!

FALK.

And if one asked the source from which you drew—?

GULDSTAD.

[*Glancing a moment at* SVANHILD, *and then turning again to* FALK.]

A common source discovered by us two.

SVANHILD.

Now I must go.

GULDSTAD.

No, wait till I conclude.
I should not ask so much of others. You,
Svanhild, I've learnt to fathom thro' and thro';
You are too sensible to play the prude.
I watched expand, unfold, your little life;
A perfect woman I divined within you,
But long I only saw a daughter in you;—
Now I ask of you—will you be my wife?

[SVANHILD *draws back in embarrassment.*

FALK.

[*Seizing his arm.*]

Hold!

GULDSTAD.

Patience; she must answer. Put your own
Question;—then her decision will be free.

FALK.

I—do you say?

GULDSTAD.

[*Looking steadily at him.*]

The happiness of three
Lives is at stake to-day,—not mine alone.
Don't fancy it concerns you less than me;
For tho' base matter is my chosen sphere,
Yet nature made me something of a seer.
Yes, Falk, you love her. Gladly, I confess,
I saw your young love bursting into flower.
But this young passion, with its lawless power,
May be the ruin of her happiness.

FALK.

[*Firing up.*]

You have the face to say so?

GULDSTAD.

[*Quietly.*]

Years give right.
Say now you won her—

FALK.

[*Defiantly.*]

And what then?

GULDSTAD.

[*Slowly and emphatically.*]

Yes, say
She ventured in one bottom to embark
Her all, her all upon one card to play,—
And then life's tempest swept the ship away,
And the flower faded as the day grew dark?

FALK.

[*Involuntarily.*]

She must not!

GULDSTAD.

[*Looking at him with meaning.*]

Hm. So I myself decided
When I was young, like you. In days of old
I was afire for one. Our paths divided.
Last night we met again;—the fire was cold

FALK.

Last night?

GULDSTAD.

Last night. You know the parson's dame—

FALK.

What? It was s h e, then, who—

GULDSTAD.

Who lit the flame.
Long I remembered her with keen regret,
And still in my remembrance she arose
As the young lovely woman that she was
When in life's buoyant spring-time first we met.
And that same foolish fire you now are fain
To light, that game of hazard you would dare.
See, that is why I call to you—beware!
The game is perilous! Pause, and think again!

FALK.

No, to the whole tea-caucus I declared
My fixed and unassailable belief—

GULDSTAD.

[*Completing his sentence.*]

That heartfelt love can weather unimpaired
Custom, and Poverty, and Age, and Grief.
Well, say it be so; possibly you're right;
But see the matter in another light.
What l o v e is, no man ever told us—whence
It issues, that ecstatic confidence

That one life may fulfil itself in two,—
To this no mortal ever found the clue.
But m a r r i a g e is a practical concern,
As also is betrothal, my good sir—
And by experience easily we learn
That we are fitted just for h e r, or h e r.
But love, you know, goes blindly to its fate,
Chooses a woman, not a wife, for mate;
And what if now this chosen woman was
No wife for you—?

FALK.

[*In suspense.*]

Well?

GULDSTAD.

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*]

Then you've lost your cause.
To make a happy bridegroom and a bride
Demands not love alone, but much beside,
Relations one can meet with satisfaction,
Ideas that do not wholly disagree.
And marriage? Why, it is a very sea
Of claims and calls, of taxing and exaction,
Whose bearing upon love is very small.
Here mild domestic virtues are demanded,
A kitchen soul, inventive and neat handed,
Making no claims, and executing all;—
And much which in a lady's presence I
Can hardly with decorum specify.

FALK.

And therefore—?

GULDSTAD.

Hear a golden counsel then.
Use your experience; watch your fellow-men,
How every loving couple struts and swaggers
Like millionaires among a world of beggars.
They scamper to the altar, lad and lass,
They make a home and, drunk with exultation,
Dwell for awhile within its walls of glass.
Then comes the day of reckoning;—out, alas,
They're bankrupt, and their house in liquidation!
Bankrupt the bloom of youth on woman's brow,
Bankrupt the flower of passion in her breast,
Bankrupt the husband's battle-ardour now,
Bankrupt each spark of passion he possessed.
Bankrupt the whole estate, below, above,—
And yet this broken pair were once confessed
A first-class house in all the wares of love!

FALK.

[*Vehemently.*]

That is a lie!

GULDSTAD.

[*Unmoved.*]

Some hours ago 'twas true
However. I have only quoted you;—
In these same words you challenged to the field
The "caucus" with love's name upon your shield.
Then rang repudiation fast and thick
From all directions, as from you at present;
Incredible, I know; who finds it pleasant
To hear the name of death when he is sick?
Look at the priest! A painter and composer

Of taste and spirit when he wooed his bride;—
What wonder if the man became a proser
When she was snugly settled by his side?
To be his lady-love she was most fit;
To be his wife, tho'—not a bit of it.
And then the clerk, who once wrote clever numbers?
No sooner was the gallant plighted, fixed,
Than all his rhymes ran counter and got mixed;
And now his Muse continuously slumbers,
Lullabied by the law's eternal hum.
Thus you see— [*Looks at* SVANHILD.
Are you cold?

SVANHILD.

[*Softly.*]

No.

FALK.

[*With forced humour.*]

Since the sum
Works out a m i n u s then in every case
And never shows a p l u s,—why should you be
So resolute your capital to place
In such a questionable lottery?
It almost looks as if you fancied Fate
Had meant you for a bankrupt from your birth?

GULDSTAD.

[*Looks at him, smiles, and shakes his head.*]

My bold young Falk, reserve a while your mirth.—
There are two ways of founding an estate.
It may be built on credit—drafts long-dated
On pleasure in a never-ending bout,
On perpetuity of youth unbated,

And permanent postponement of the gout.
It may be built on lips of rosy red,
On sparkling eyes and locks of flowing gold,
On trust these glories never will be shed,
Nor the dread hour of periwigs be tolled.
It may be built on thoughts that glow and quiver,—
Flowers blowing in the sandy wilderness,—
On hearts that, to the end of life, for ever
Throb with the passion of the primal "yes."
To dealings such as this the world extends
One epithet: 'tis known as "humbug," friends.

FALK.

I see, you are a dangerous attorney,
You—well-to-do, a millionaire, maybe;
While two broad backs could carry in one journey
All that beneath the sun belongs to me.

GULDSTAD.

[*Sharply.*]

What do you mean?

FALK.

That is not hard to see.
For the sound way of building, I suppose,
Is just with cash—the wonder-working paint
That round the widow's batten'd forehead throws
The aureole of a young adored saint.

GULDSTAD.

O no, 'tis something better that I meant.
'Tis the still flow of generous esteem,

Which no less honours the recipient
Than does young rapture's giddy-whirling dream.
It is the feeling of the blessedness
Of service, and home quiet, and tender ties,
The joy of mutual self-sacrifice,
Of keeping watch lest any stone distress
Her footsteps wheresoe'er her pathway lies;
It is the healing arm of a true friend,
The manly muscle that no burdens bend,
The constancy no length of years decays,
The arm that stoutly lifts and firmly stays.
This, Svanhild, is the contribution I
Bring to your fortune's fabric: now, reply.

[SVANHILD *makes an effort to speak;* GULDSTAD *lifts his hand to check her.*

Consider well before you give your voice!
With clear deliberation make your choice.

FALK.

And how have you discovered—

GULDSTAD.

That you love her?
That in your eyes 'twas easy to discover.
Let her too know it. [*Presses his hand.*
Now I will go in.
Let the jest cease and earnest work begin;
And if you undertake that till the end
You'll be to her no less a faithful friend,
A staff to lean on, and a help in need,
Than I can be— [*Turning to* SVANHILD.
Why, good, my offer's nought;
Cancel it from the tables of your thought.

Then it is I who triumph in very deed;
You're happy, and for nothing else I fought.
[*To* FALK.
And, apropos—just now you spoke of cash,
Trust me, 'tis little more than tinsell'd trash.
I have no ties, stand perfectly alone;
To you I will make over all I own;
My daughter she shall be, and you my son.
You know I have a business by the border:
There I'll retire, you set your home in order,
And we'll foregather when a year is gone.
Now, Falk, you know me; with the same precision
Observe yourself: the voyage down life's stream,
Remember, is no pastime and no dream.
Now, in the name of God—make your decision!

[*Goes into the house. Pause.* FALK *and* SVANHILD *look shyly at each other.*

FALK.

You are so pale.

SVANHILD.

And you so silent.

FALK.

True.

SVANHILD.

He smote us hardest.

FALK.

[*To himself.*]

Stole my armour, too.

SVANHILD.

What blows he struck!

FALK.

He knew to place them well.

SVANHILD.

All seemed to go to pieces where they fell.
[*Coming nearer to him.*
How rich in one another's wealth before
We were, when all had left us in despite,
And Thought rose upward like the echoing roar
Of breakers in the silence of the night.
With exultation then we faced the fray,
And confidence that Love is lord of death;—
He came with worldly cunning, stole our faith,
Sowed doubt,—and all the glory pass'd away!

FALK.

[*With wild vehemence.*]

Tear, tear it from thy memory! All his talk
Was true for others, but for us a lie!

SVANHILD.

[*Slowly shaking her head.*]

The golden grain, hail-stricken on its stalk,
Will never more wave wanton to the sky.

FALK.

[*With an outburst of anguish.*]

Yes, we two, Svanhild—!

SVANHILD.

Hence with hopes that snare!
If you sow falsehood, you must reap despair.
For others true, you say? And do you doubt
That each of them, like us, is sure, alike,
That he's the man the lightning will not strike,
And no avenging thunder will find out,
Whom the blue storm-cloud, scudding up the sky
On wings of tempest, never can come nigh?

FALK.

The others split their souls on scattered ends:
Thy single love my being comprehends.
They're hoarse with yelling in life's Babel din:
I in this quiet shelter fold thee in.

SVANHILD.

But if love, notwithstanding, should decay,
—Love being Happiness's single stay—
Could you avert, then, Happiness's fall?

FALK.

No, my love's ruin were the wreck of all.

SVANHILD.

And can you promise me before the Lord
That it will last, not drooping like the flower,
But smell as sweet as now till life's last hour?

FALK.

[*After a short pause.*]

It will last long.

SVANHILD.

[*With anguish.*]

"Long!" "Long!"—Poor starveling word!
Can "long" give any comfort in Love's need?
It is her death-doom, blight upon her seed.
"My faith is, Love will never pass away"—
T h a t song must cease, and in its stead be heard:
"My faith is, that I loved you yesterday!"
[*As uplifted by inspiration.*
No, no, not thus our day of bliss shall wane,
Flag drearily to west in clouds and rain;—
But at high noontide, when it is most bright,
Plunge sudden, like a meteor, into night!

FALK.

[*In anguish.*]

What would you, Svanhild?

SVANHILD.

We are of the Spring;
No Autumn shall come after, when the bird
Of music in thy breast shall not be heard,
And long not thither where it first took wing.
Nor ever Winter shall his snowy shroud
Lay on the clay-cold body of our bliss;—
This Love of ours, ardent and glad and proud,
Pure of disease's taint and age's cloud,
Shall die the young and glorious thing it is!

FALK.

[*In deep pain.*]

And far from thee—what would be left of life?

SVANHILD.

And near me what were left—if Love depart?

FALK.

A home!

SVANHILD.

Where Joy would gasp in mortal strife.
[*Firmly.*
It was not given to me to be your wife.
That is the clear conviction of my heart!
In courtship's merry pastime I can lead,
But not sustain your spirit in its need.
[*Nearer and with gathering fire.*
Now we have revell'd out a feast of spring;
No thought of slumber's sluggard couch come nigh!
Let Joy amid delirious song make wing
And flock with choirs of cherubim on high.
And tho' the vessel of our fate capsize,
One plank yet breasts the waters, strong to save;—
The fearless swimmer reaches Paradise!
Let Joy go down into his watery grave;
Our Love shall yet in triumph, by God's hand,
Be borne from out the wreckage safe to land!

FALK.

O, I divine thee! But—to sever thus!
Now, when the portals of the world stand wide,—
When the blue spring is bending over us,
On the same day that plighted thee my bride!

SVANHILD.

Just therefore must we part. Our joy's torch fire
Will from this moment wane till it expire!

And when at last our worldly days are spent,
And face to face with our great Judge we stand,
And, as a righteous God, he shall demand
Of us the earthly treasure that he lent—
Then, Falk, we cry—past power of Grace to save—
"O Lord, we lost it going to the grave!"

FALK.

[*With strong resolve.*]

Pluck off the ring!

SVANHILD.

[*With fire.*]

Wilt thou?

FALK.

Now I divine!
Thus and no otherwise canst thou be mine!
As the grave opens into life's Dawn-fire,
So Love with Life may not espoused be
Till, loosed from longing and from wild desire,
It soars into the heaven of memory!
Pluck off the ring, Svanhild!

SVANHILD.

[*In rapture.*]

My task is done!
Now I have filled thy soul with song and sun.
Forth! Now thou soarest on triumphant wings,—
Forth! Now thy Svanhild is the swan that sings!
[*Takes off the ring and presses a kiss upon it.*
To the abysmal ooze of ocean bed

Descend, my dream!—I fling thee in its stead!

[*Goes a few steps back, throws the ring into the fjord, and approaches* FALK *with a transfigured expression.*

Now for this earthly life I have foregone thee,—
But for the life eternal I have won thee!

FALK.

[*Firmly.*]

And now to the day's duties, each, alone.
Our paths no more will mingle. Each must wage
His warfare single-handed, without moan.
We caught the fevered frenzy of the age,
Fain without fighting to secure the spoil,
Win Sabbath ease, and shirk the six days' toil,
Tho' we are called to strive and to forego.

SVANHILD.

But not in sickness.

FALK.

No,—made strong by truth.
Our heads no penal flood will overflow;
This never-dying memory of our youth
Shall gleam against the cloud-wrack like the bow
Of promise flaming in its colours seven,—
Sign that we are in harmony with heaven.
That gleam your quiet duties shall make bright—

SVANHILD.

And speed the poet in his upward flight!

FALK.

The poet, yes; for poets all men are
Who see, thro' all their labours, mean or great,
In pulpit or in schoolroom, church or state,
The Ideal's lone beacon-splendour flame afar.
Yes, upward is my flight; the winged steed
Is saddled; I am strong for noble deed.
And now farewell!

SVANHILD.

Farewell!

FALK.

[*Embracing her.*]

One kiss!

SVANHILD.

The last!

[*Tears herself free.*

Now I can lose thee gladly till life's past!

FALK.

Tho' quenched were all the light of earth and sky,—
The thought of light is God, and cannot die.

SVANHILD.

[*Withdrawing towards the background.*]

Farewell! [*Goes further.*

FALK.

Farewell—gladly I cry again—

[*Waves his hat.*

Hurrah for love, God's glorious gift to men!

[*The door opens.* FALK *withdraws to the right; the younger guests come out with merry laughter.*

THE YOUNG GIRLS.

A lawn dance!

A YOUNG GIRL.

Dancing's life!

ANOTHER.

A garland spread
With dewy blossoms fresh on every head!

SEVERAL.

Yes, to the dance, the dance!

ALL.

And ne'er to bed!

[STIVER *comes out with* STRAWMAN *arm in arm.* MRS. STRAWMAN *and the children follow.*

STIVER.

Yes, you and I henceforward are fast friends.

STRAWMAN.

Allied in battle for our common ends.

STIVER.

When the twin forces of the State agree—

STRAWMAN.

They add to all men's—

STIVER.

[*Hastily.*]

Gains!

STRAWMAN.

And gaiety.

[MRS. HALM, LIND, ANNA, GULDSTAD, *and* MISS JAY, *with the other guests, come out. All eyes are turned upon* FALK *and* SVANHILD. *General amazement when they are seen standing apart.*

MISS JAY.

[*Among the* AUNTS, *clasping her hands.*]

What! Am I awake or dreaming, pray?

LIND.

[*Who has noticed nothing.*]

I have a brother's compliments to pay.

[*He, with the other guests, approaches* FALK, *but starts involuntarily and steps back on looking at him.*

What is the matter with you? You're a Janus
With double face!

FALK.

[*Smiling.*]

I cry, like old Montanus,[1]
The earth is flat, Messieurs;—my optics lied;
Flat as a pancake—are you satisfied?

[*Goes quickly out to the right.*

[1] See Notes, page 484.

MISS JAY.

Refused!

THE AUNTS.

Refused!

MRS. HALM.

Hush, ladies, if you please!

[*Goes across to* SVANHILD.

MRS. STRAWMAN.

[*To* STRAWMAN.]

Fancy, refused!

STRAWMAN.

It cannot be!

MISS JAY.

It is!

THE LADIES.

[*From mouth to mouth.*]

Refused! Refused! Refused!

[*They gather in little groups about the garden.*

STIVER.

[*Dumfounded.*]

He courting? How?

STRAWMAN.

Yes, think! He laugh'd at us, ha, ha—but now—

[*They gaze at each other speechless.*

ANNA.

[*To* LIND.]

That's good! He was too horrid, to be sure!

LIND.

[*Embracing her.*]

Hurrah, now thou art mine, entire and whole.
[*They go outside into the garden.*

GULDSTAD.

[*Looking back towards* SVANHILD.]

Something is shattered in a certain soul;
But what is yet alive in it I'll cure.

STRAWMAN.

[*Recovering himself and embracing* STIVER.]

Now then, you can be very well contented
To have your dear *fiancée* for a spouse.

STIVER.

And you complacently can see your house
With little Strawmans every year augmented.

STRAWMAN.

[*Rubbing his hands with satisfaction and looking after* FALK.]

Insolent fellow! Well, it served him right;—
Would all these knowing knaves were in his plight!

[*They go across in conversation;* MRS. HALM *approaches with* SVANHILD.

MRS. HALM.

[*Aside, eagerly.*]

And nothing binds you?

SVANHILD.

Nothing.

MRS. HALM.

Good, you know
A daughter's duty—

SVANHILD.

Guide me, I obey.

MRS. HALM.

Thanks, child. [*Pointing to* GULDSTAD.
He is a rich and *comme il faut*
Parti; and since there's nothing in the way—

SVANHILD.

Yes, there is one condition I require!—
To leave this place.

MRS. HALM.

Precisely his desire.

SVANHILD.

And time—

MRS. HALM.

How long? Bethink you, fortune's calling!

SVANHILD.

[*With a quiet smile.*]

Only a little; till the leaves are falling.

[*She goes towards the verandah;* MRS. HALM *seeks out* GULDSTAD.

STRAWMAN.

[*Among the guests.*]

One lesson, friends, we learn from this example!
Tho' Doubt's beleaguering forces hem us in,
Yet Truth upon the Serpent's head shall trample,
The cause of Love shall win—

GUESTS.

Yes, Love shall win!

[*They embrace and kiss, pair by pair. Outside to the left are heard song and laughter.*

MISS JAY.

What can this mean?

ANNA.

The students!

LIND.

The quartette,
Bound for the mountains;—and I quite forgot
To tell them—

[*The* STUDENTS *come in to the left and remain standing at the entrance.*

A STUDENT.

[*To* LIND.]

Here we are upon the spot!

MRS. HALM.

It's Lind you seek, then?

MISS JAY.

That's unfortunate.
He's just engaged—

AN AUNT.

And so, you may be sure,
He cannot think of going on a tour.

THE STUDENTS.

Engaged!

ALL THE STUDENTS.

Congratulations!

LIND.

[*To his comrades.*]

Thanks, my friends!

THE STUDENT.

[*To his comrades.*]

There goes our whole fish-kettle in the fire!
Our tenor lost! No possible amends!

FALK.

[*Coming from the right, in summer suit, with student's cap, knapsack and stick.*]

I'll sing the tenor in young Norway's choir!

THE STUDENTS.

You, Falk! hurrah!

FALK.

Forth to the mountains, come!
As the bee hurries from her winter home!
A twofold music in my breast I bear,
A cither with diversely sounding strings,
One for life's joy, a treble loud and clear,
And one deep note that quivers as it sings.
[*To individuals among the* STUDENTS.
You have the palette?—You the note-book? Good,
Swarm then, my bees, into the leafy wood,
Till at nightfall with pollen-laden thigh,
Home to our mighty mother-queen we fly!
[*Turning to the company, while the* STUDENTS *depart and the Chorus of the First Act is faintly heard outside.*
Forgive me my offences great and small,
I resent nothing;— [*Softly.*
but remember all.

STRAWMAN.

[*Beaming with happiness.*]

Now fortune's garden once again is green!
My wife has hopes,—a sweet presentiment—
[*Draws him whispering apart.*
She lately whispered of a glad event—
[*Inaudible words intervene.*
If all goes well . . . at Michaelmas . . . thirteen!

STIVER.

[*With* MISS JAY *on his arm, turning to* FALK, *smiles triumphantly, and says, pointing to* STRAWMAN:]

I'm going to start a household, flush of pelf!

MISS JAY.

[*With an ironical courtesy.*]

I shall put on my wedding-ring next Yule.

ANNA.

[*Similarly, as she takes* LIND'S *arm.*]

My Lind will stay, the Church can mind itself—

LIND.

[*Hiding his embarrassment.*]

And seek an opening in a ladies' school.

MRS. HALM.

I cultivate my Anna's capabilities—

GULDSTAD.

[*Gravely.*]

An unromantic poem I mean to make
Of one who only lives for duty's sake.

FALK.

[*With a smile to the whole company.*]

I go to scale the Future's possibilities!
Farewell! [*Softly to* SVANHILD.
God bless thee, bride of my life's dawn,
Where'er I be, to nobler deed thou'lt wake me.
[*Waves his hat and follows the* STUDENTS.

SVANHILD.

[*Looks after him a moment, then says, softly but firmly:*]

Now over is my life, by lea and lawn,

The leaves are falling;—now the world may take me.

[*At this moment the piano strikes up a dance, and champagne corks explode in the background. The gentlemen hurry to and fro with their ladies on their arms.* GULDSTAD *approaches* SVANHILD *and bows: she starts momentarily, then collects herself and gives him her hand.* MRS. HALM *and her family, who have watched the scene in suspense, throng about them with expressions of rapture, which are overpowered by the music and the merriment of the dancers in the garden.*

[*But from the country the following chorus rings loud and defiant through the dance music:*

CHORUS OF FALK AND THE STUDENTS.

And what if I shattered my roaming bark,
It was passing sweet to be roaming!

MOST OF THE COMPANY.

Hurrah!

[*Dance and merriment; the curtain falls.*

NOTES

P. 324. *William Russel.* An original historic tragedy, founded upon the career of the ill-fated Lord William Russell, by Andreas Munch, cousin of the historian P. A. Munch. It was produced at Christiania in 1857, the year of Ibsen's return from Bergen, and reviewed by him in the *Illustreret Nyhedsblad* for that year, Nos. 51 and 52. Professor Johan Storm of Christiania, to whose kindness I owe these particulars, adds that "it is rather a fine play and created a certain sensation in its time; but Munch is forgotten."

P. 326. *A gray old stager.* Ibsen's friend P. Botten-Hansen, author of the play *Hyldrebryllupet.*

P. 367. *A Svanhild, like the old.* In the tale of the Völsungs Svanhild was the daughter of Sigurd and Gudrun,—the Siegfried and Kriemhild of the *Nibelungenlied.* The fierce king Jormunrek, hearing of her matchless beauty, sends his son Randwer to woo her in his name. Randwer is, however, induced to woo her in his own, and the girl approves. Jormunrek thereupon causes Randwer to be arrested and hanged, and meeting with Svanhild, as he and his men ride home from the hunt, tramples her to death under their horses' hoofs. Gudrun incites her sons Sorli and Hamdir to avenge their sister; they boldly enter Jormunrek's hall, and succeed in cutting off his hands and feet, but are themselves slain by his men. This last dramatic episode is told in the Eddic *Hamthismol.*

P. 405. *In the remotest east there grows a plant.* The germ of the famous tea-simile is due to Fru Collett's romance, *The Official's Daughters.* But she exploits the idea only under a single and obvious aspect, viz., the comparison of the tender bloom of love with the precious firstling blade which brews the quintessential tea for the Chinese emperor's table; what the world calls love being, like what it calls tea, a coarse and flavourless aftercrop. Ibsen has, it will be seen, given a number of ingenious developments to the analogy. I know

Fru Collett's work only through the accounts of it given by Brandes and Jæger.

P. 448. *Another Burns.* In the original: *Dölen* (*The Dalesman*), that is A. O. Vinje, Ibsen's friend and literary comrade, editor of the journal so-called and hence known familiarly by its name. See the Introduction.

P. 474. *Like Old Montanus.* The hero of Holberg's comedy *Erasmus Mountanus*, who returns from foreign travel to his native parish with the discovery that the world is *not* flat. Public indignation is aroused, and Montanus finds it expedient to announce that his eyes had deceived him, that "the world *is* flat, gentlemen."

THE VIKINGS AT HELGELAND

THE PRETENDERS

CONTENTS

PAGE

INTRODUCTION TO "THE VIKINGS AT HELGELAND" 3

"THE VIKINGS AT HELGELAND" 17
Translated by WILLIAM ARCHER

INTRODUCTION TO "THE PRETENDERS" 141

"THE PRETENDERS" 153
Translated by WILLIAM ARCHER

THE VIKINGS AT HELGELAND

THE VIKINGS AT HELGELAND

INTRODUCTION*

IBSEN himself has told us, in his preface to the second edition of *The Feast at Solhoug*, how the reading of the Icelandic family-sagas suggested to him, in germ, the theme of *The Vikings at Helgeland*. What he first saw, he says, was the contrasted figures of the two women who ultimately became Hiördis and Dagny, together with a great banquet-scene at which an interchange of taunts and gibes should lead to tragic consequences. The conception of the two women's characters was certainly not new to him, seeing that a similar contrast presents itself in his very earliest work, *Catilina*, between the aptly-named Furia and the gentle Aurelia; while even in *Lady Inger of Östråt* it reappears, somewhat disguised, in the contrast between Inger Gyldenlöve and her daughter Elina. While the scheme of *The Vikings* was still entirely vague, however, fresh influences, both of a personal and of a literary nature, intervened, and, transposing the theme from the purely dramatic into the lyrical key, he produced *The Feast at Solhoug*. The foster-sisters, Hiördis and Dagny, became the sisters Margit and Signë, and the banquet, instead of being the culminating-point of the dramatic action, became its mere background.

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The fact probably is that in 1855 the poet found himself still unripe for the intense effort of dramatic concentration involved in such a work as *The Vikings*. Probably, too, he knew that neither his actors nor his public at the Bergen Theatre were prepared to go back to the primitive austerity of the heroic age, as it was beginning to body itself forth in his mind. The good Bergensers were accustomed either to French intrigue (such as he had given them in *Lady Inger*) or to Danish lyrical romanticism; and he perhaps foresaw that the ruling taste of Bergen would be as hard to contend against as, in the sequel, the ruling taste of Copenhagen actually proved to be. At all events, from whatever mingling of motives, he put the heroic theme aside for two years, while he kept to the key of lyrical romanticism not only in the *Feast at Solhoug*, written in the summer of 1855, but also in the very feeble *Olaf Liliekrans*, conceived much earlier, but written in 1856. Not until he had left Bergen behind him, and returned to Christiania in the summer of 1857, did the poet take up again, and rapidly work out, the theme of *The Vikings*. It is almost inconceivable that only a year should have intervened between it and *Olaf Liliekrans*.

Paul Botten-Hansen, perhaps Ibsen's closest friend of those days, has stated that *The Vikings* was begun in verse. If so, the metre chosen was probably the twelve-syllable measure of Oehlenschläger's *Balder's Death*, supposed to represent the iambic trimeter of the Greek dramatists. In an essay *On the Heroic Ballad*, written in Bergen in the early months of 1857, Ibsen had condemned, as a medium for the treatment of Scandinavian themes,

the iambic decasyllable (our blank verse) in which Oehlenschläger had written most of his plays, and which Ibsen himself had adopted in his early imitation of Oehlenschläger, *The Warrior's Barrow*. Blank verse Ibsen regarded as "entirely foreign" to Norwegian-Danish prosody, and, moreover, a product of Christian influences; whereas pagan antiquity, if treated in verse at all, ought to be treated in the pagan measure of the Greeks. At the same time we find him expressing a doubt whether Oehlenschläger's *Hakon Jarl* might not have been just as poetic in prose as in verse—a doubt which clearly shows in what direction his thoughts were turning. It must be regarded as a great mercy that he abandoned the iambic trimeter, which, in Oehlenschläger's hands, was nothing but an unrhymed Alexandrine with the cæsura displaced.

This same essay *On the Heroic Ballad* throws a curious light on the difficulties which occasioned the long delay between the conception and the execution of *The Vikings*. He lays it down that "the heroic ballad is much better fitted than the saga for dramatic treatment. The saga is a great, cold, rounded, and self-contained epos, essentially objective, and exclusive of all lyricism. . . . If, now, the poet is to extract a dramatic work from this epic material, he must necessarily bring into it a foreign, a lyrical, element; for the drama is well known to be a higher blending of the lyric and the epos." This "well-known" dogma he probably accepted from the German æstheticians with whom, about this time, he seems to have busied himself. A little further on, he adds that the accommodating prosody of the ballads gives room for

"many freedoms which are of great importance to dramatic dialogue," and consequently prophesies a great future for the drama drawn from this source. It was a luckless prophecy. He himself, though apparently he little guessed it, had done his last work in lyrical romance; and though it has survived, sporadically, in Danish and even in German literature, it can count but few masterpieces during the past half-century. Perhaps, however, Hauptmann's *Sunken Bell* might be taken as justifying Ibsen's forecast.[1]

It must have been very soon after this essay was published (May 1857) that Ibsen discovered how to impose dramatic form upon the epic material of the sagas, without dragging in any foreign lyrical element. He suddenly saw his way, it would seem, to reproducing in dialogue the terse, unvarnished prose of the sagas themselves, eloquent in reticence rather than in rhetorical or lyrical abundance.

Had he, or had he not, in the meantime read Björnson's one-act play, *Between the Battles?* It was not produced until October 27, 1857, by which time *The Vikings* must have been almost, if not quite, finished. But Ibsen may have seen it in manuscript several months earlier, and it may have put him on the track of the form in which to cast his saga-material. The style of *The Vikings* is incomparably firmer, purer, more homogeneous and clear-cut than that of *Between the Battles;* but Björnson's mediæval comedietta (it is really little more) may quite

[1] Though he himself wrote no more plays in the key of *The Feast at Solhoug*, the "accommodating prosody" of the ballads had doubtless its influence on the metres of *Peer Gynt*.

well have given Ibsen a valuable impulse towards the adaptation of the saga-style to drama. The point, however, is of little moment. It is much more important to note that while Ibsen was writing *The Vikings* Björnson was writing his peasant-idyll *Synnöve Solbakken;* so that these two corner-stones of modern Norwegian literature were laid, to all intents and purposes, simultaneously.

In an autobiographic letter to Peter Hansen,[1] written in 1870, Ibsen mentions this play very briefly: "*The Vikings at Helgeland* I wrote whilst I was engaged to be married. For Hiördis I had the same model as I took afterwards for Svanhild in *Love's Comedy.*" More noteworthy is his preface to a German translation of the play, published in 1876. It runs as follows:

"In issuing a German translation of one of my earlier dramatic works, it may not be superfluous to remark that I have taken the material of this play, not from the *Nibelungenlied,* but in part—and in part only—from a kindred Scandinavian source, the *Volsung-Saga.* More essentially, however, my poem may be said to be founded upon the various Icelandic family-sagas, in which it often seems that the titanic conditions and occurrences of the *Nibelungenlied* and the *Volsung-Saga* have simply been reduced to human dimensions. Hence I think we may conclude that the situations and events depicted in these two documents were typically characteristic of our common Germanic life in the earliest historical times. If this view be justified, it disposes of the reproach that in the present drama our national mythic world is brought down to a lower plane than that to which it belongs. The

[1] *Correspondence,* Letter 74.

idealised, and in some degree impersonal, myth-figures are exceedingly ill-adapted for representation on the stage of to-day; and, however this may be, it was not my aim to present our mythic world, but simply our life in primitive times."

The reasoning of this passage does not seem very cogent; but it expresses clearly enough the design which the poet proposed to himself. Before discussing the merits of the play, however, I may as well complete the outline of its external history.

Part of that external history is written by Ibsen himself in letters to the Christiania Press of the day. In the autumn of 1857, he presented the play to the Christiania Theatre, then occupied by a Danish company under Danish management. After a long delay, he ascertained that it had been accepted and would be produced in March, 1858. He then proposed to consult with the manager as to the casting of the piece, but found that that functionary had no clear conception of either the plot or the characters, and therefore left him a couple of months in which to study it. At the end of that time the poet again reminded the potentate of his existence, and learned that "since the economic status and prospects of the theatre did not permit of its paying fees for original works," the proposed production could not take place. Ibsen hints that, had the choice been offered him, he would have consented to the performance of the piece without fee or reward. As the choice was not offered him, he regarded the whole episode as a move in the anti-national policy of the Danish management; and the controversy which arose out of the incident doubtless con-

tributed to the nationalisation of the Christiania Theatre —the supersession of Danish by Norwegian managers, actors and authors—which took place during the succeeding decade.

In the meantime, almost simultaneously with the rejection of the play by the Christiania Theatre, it was rejected by the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen. The director, J. L. Heiberg, was then regarded as an autocrat in the æsthetic world; and his report on *The Vikings* is now a curiosity of literature. He declared that nothing was so "monotonous, tiresome and devoid of all poetry" as the Icelandic family-sagas; he could not endure their "wildness and rawness" on the stage; the saga-style, as reproduced by Ibsen, seemed to him "mannered and affected"; and he concluded his judgment in these terms: "A Norwegian theatre will scarcely take its rise from such experiments, and the Danish theatre has fortunately no need for them."

The play was published in April, 1858, as a supplement to a Christiania illustrated paper, the author receiving an "honorarium" of something less than £7. On November 24, 1858, it was produced at the little "Norwegian Theatre" in Christiania, of which the poet was then director. At the Bergen Theatre it was produced in 1859, at the Christiania Theatre (by that time pretty well Norwegianised) in 1861. It did not make its way to Copenhagen and Stockholm until 1875. In 1876 it was acted at the Court Theatres of Munich and Dresden, and at the Vienna Burgtheater. Thenceforward it was pretty frequently seen on the German stage; but it does not seem to have reached Berlin (Deutsches Theater) until 1890.

In 1892 it was produced in Moscow. The only production in the English language of which any account has reached me took place in 1903 at the Imperial Theatre, London, when Miss Ellen Terry appeared as Hiördis and Mr. Oscar Asche as Sigurd. The scenery and dresses were designed by Miss Terry's son, Mr. Gordon Craig.

It would need not merely an essay, but a volume, to discuss the relation of *The Vikings* to its mythic material, and to other modern treatments of that material—Friedrich Hebbel's *Die Nibelungen*, Richard Wagner's *Ring der Nibelungen*, etc. The poet's actual indebtedness to the *Volsung-Saga* is well summarised by Henrik Jæger in his *Life of Ibsen*: "Like Sigurd Fafnir's-bane," he says, "Sigurd Viking has achieved the deed which Hiördis (Brynhild) demands of the man who shall wed her; and, again like his heroic namesake, he has renounced her in favour of his foster-brother, Gunnar, himself taking another to wife. This other woman reveals the secret in the course of an altercation with Hiördis (Brynhild), who, in consequence of this discovery, brings about Sigurd's death and her own. The reader will observe that we must keep to very general terms if they are to fit both the saga and the drama. Are there any further coincidences? Yes, one. After Gudrun has betrayed the secret, there comes a scene in which she seeks to appease Brynhild, and begs her to think no more of it; then follows a scene in which Sigurd explains to Brynhild how it all happened; and finally a scene in which Brynhild goads Gunnar to kill Sigurd. All these scenes have their parallels in the third act of *The Vikings;* but their order is different, and none of their wording has been

adopted." From the family-sagas, again, not only the stature of the characters, so to speak, but several details of incident and dialogue are borrowed. The boasting-match at Gunnar's feast, which, as we have seen, was one of the first elements of the story to present itself to Ibsen's mind, has many analogies in Icelandic lore. Örnulf's questions as to how Thorolf fell are borrowed from *Egils Saga*, and so is the idea of his "drapa," or funeral chant over his dead sons. Sigurd and Hiördis are, perhaps, almost as closely related to Kiartan and Gudrun in the *Laxdœla Saga* as to Sigurd's Fafnir's-bane and Brynhild. Indeed, Ibsen seems to have reckoned too confidently on the unfamiliarity of his public with the stores of material upon which he drew. Not, of course, that there could be any question of plagiarism. The sagas were as legitimately at Ibsen's service as were Plutarch and Holinshed at Shakespeare's. But having been himself, as he tells us, almost ignorant of the existence of these sagas until he came across N. M. Petersen's translation of them, he forgot that people who had long known and loved them might resent the removal of this trait and that from its original setting, and might hold it to be, in its new context, degraded and sentimentalised. "It may be," writes H. H. Boyesen, in his generally depreciatory remarks on the play, "that my fondness for these sagas themselves prevents me from relishing the modification and remoulding to which Ibsen has subjected them." Dr. Brandes, too, points to a particular instance in which the sense of degradation could not but be felt. The day-dream as to the hair-woven bowstring which Hiördis relates to Sigurd in the third act (p. 105) is in itself effective

enough; but any one who knows the splendid passage in *Nials Saga*, on which it is founded, cannot but feel that the actual (or at any rate legendary) event is impoverished by being dragged in under the guise of a mere morbid fantasy.

On the whole, I think Ibsen can scarcely escape the charge of having sentimentalised the sagas in the same way, though not in the same degree, in which Tennyson has sentimentalised the Arthurian legends. Indeed, Sigurd the Strong is not without points of resemblance to the Blameless King of the *Idylls*. But, for my part, I cannot regard this as a very serious charge. *The Vikings* is the work of a man still young (29), who had, moreover, developed very slowly. It is still steeped in romanticism, though not in the almost boyish lyricism of its predecessors. The poet is not yet intellectually mature—very far from it. But here, for the first time, we are unmistakably face to face with a great imagination and a specifically dramatic endowment of the first order. The germs of promise discernible in *Lady Inger* have ripened into rare technical mastery.

Ibsen was doubtless right in feeling that the superhuman figures of the mythical sagas were impossible on the non-musical stage, just as Wagner was right in feeling that the world of myth could be embodied only in an atmosphere of music. The reduction, then, of the Volsungs and Niblungs to the stature of the men of the family-sagas was not only judicious, but necessary. But was it judicious to go to the myth-sagas for the initial idea of a play which had to be developed in terms of the family-sagas? Scarcely, I think. The weak points in the struc-

ture of the story are precisely those at which the poet has had to replace supernatural by natural machinery. To slay a dragon and to break through a wall of fire, even with magical aid, are exploits which we can accept, on the mythic plane, as truly stupendous. But it is impossible to be really impressed by the slaying of Hiördis's bear, or to share in the breathless admiration with which that achievement is always mentioned. If the bear is to be regarded as a fabulous monster, it might just as well be a dragon at once; if it is to be accepted as a real quadruped, the killing of it is no such mighty matter. We feel it, in fact, to be a mere substitute, a more or less ludicrous makeshift. And in the same way, Sigurd's renunciation of Hiördis becomes very difficult to accept when all supernatural agency—magic potion, or other sleight of wizardy—is eliminated. We feel that he behaves like a nincompoop in despairing of winning her for himself, merely because she does not show an obviously "coming on" disposition, and like an immoral sentimentalist in handing her over to Gunnar. This, to be sure, is the poet's own criticism of his action. The lie which Sigurd and Gunnar conspire to tell, or rather to enact, is the root of the whole tragedy. We have here Ibsen's first treatment of the theme with which he is afterwards so much concerned—the necessity of truth as the basis of every human relation. Gunnar's acquiescence in Sigurd's heroic mendacity is as clearly condemned and punished, as, in *Pillars of Society*, Bernick's acquiescence in Johan's almost equally heroic self-sacrifice. Both plays convey a warning against excesses of altruism, and show that we have no right to offer sacrifices which the person benefit-

ing by them has no right to accept. But to indicate a correct moral judgment of Sigurd's action is not to make it psychologically plausible. We feel, I repeat, that the poet is trying in vain to rationalise a series of actions which are comprehensible only on the supernatural plane.

This unreality of plot involved a similar unreality, or at any rate extreme simplicity, of characterisation. All the personages are drawn in large, obvious traits, which never undergo the smallest modification. Sigurd is throughout the magnanimous hero, Dagny the submissive, amiable wife, Hiördis the valkyrie-virago, Gunnar the well-meaning weakling, not cowardly but inefficient. By far the most human and most individual figure is old Örnulf, in whom the spirit of the family-sagas is magnificently incarnated. We feel throughout the inexperience of the author, his incuriousness of half-tones in character, his tendency to view human relations and problems in a purely sentimental light. To compare Hiördis with Hedda Gabler, Sigurd with Halvard Solness, is to realise what an immeasurable process of evolution the poet was destined to go through. Indeed, we as yet seem far enough off even from Duke Skule and Bishop Nicholas.

But the man of inventive imagination and the man of the theatre are already here in all their strength. Whatever motives and suggestions Ibsen found in the sagas, the construction of the play is all his own and is quite masterly. Exposition, development, the carrying on of the interest from act to act—all this is perfect in its kind. The play is "well-made" in the highest sense of the word. Already the poet shows himself consummate in his art of gradually lifting veil after veil from the past, and mak-

ing each new discovery involve a more or less striking change in the relations of the persons on the stage. But it is not technically alone that the play is great. The whole second act is a superbly designed and modulated piece of drama; and, for pure nobility and pathos, the scene of Örnulf's return—entirely of the poet's own invention—is surely one of the greatest things in dramatic literature. It is marvellous that even æsthetic prejudice should have prevented a man like J. L. Heiberg from recognising that he was here in presence of a great poet. The interest of the third act is mainly psychological, and the psychology, as we have seen, is neither very profound nor very convincing. But the fourth act, again, rises to a great height of romantic impressiveness. Whatever hints may have come from the sagas, the picture of Örnulf's effort of self-mastery is a very noble piece of work; and the plunge into supernaturalism at the close, in the child's vision of Asgårdsreien, with his mother leading the rout, seems to me an entirely justified piece of imaginative daring. I cannot even agree with Dr. Brandes in condemning as "Geheimniskrämerei" Sigurd's dying revelation of the fact that he is a Christian. It seems to me to harmonise entirely with the whole sentimental colouring of the play. The worst flaws I find in this act are the terrible asides placed in the mouths of Gunnar and Dagny after the discovery of Sigurd's death.

The word *Vikings* in the title is a very free rendering of *Hærmændene*, which simply means "warriors." As "warriors," however, is a colourless word, and as Örnulf, Sigurd, and Gunnar all are, or have been, actually

vikings, the substitution seemed justifiable. I would beg, however hopelessly, that "viking" should be pronounced so as to rhyme *not* with "liking" but with "seeking," or at worst with "kicking." Helgeland, it may be mentioned, is a province or district in the north of Norway.

Örnulf's "drapa" and his snatches of verse are rhymed as well as alliterated in the original. I had the less hesitation in suppressing the rhyme, as it was actually foreign to the practice of the skalds.

THE VIKINGS AT HELGELAND
(1858)

CHARACTERS

ÖRNULF OF THE FIORDS, *an Icelandic Chieftain.*
SIGURD THE STRONG, *a Sea-King.*
GUNNAR HEADMAN,[1] *a rich yeoman of Helgeland.*
THOROLF, *Örnulf's youngest son.*
DAGNY, *Örnulf's daughter.*
HIÖRDIS, *his foster-daughter.*
KÅRE THE PEASANT, *a Helgeland-man.*
EGIL, *Gunnar's son, four years old.*
ÖRNULF'S SIX OLDER SONS.
ÖRNULF'S AND SIGURD'S MEN.
Guests, house-carls, serving-maids, outlaws, etc.

The action takes place in the time of Erik Blood-axe (about 933 A.D.) *at, and in the neighbourhood of, Gunnar's house, on the island of Helgeland, in the north of Norway.*

Pronunciation of Names: Helgeland = Helgheland; Örnulf = Örnoolf; Sigurd = Sigoord; Gunnar = Goonnar; Thorolf = Toorolf; Hiördis = Yördeess; Kåre = Koarë; Egil = Ayghil. The letter "ö" as in German.

[1] Failing to find a better equivalent for the Norwegian "Herse," I have used the word "Headman" wherever it seemed necessary to give Gunnar a title or designation. He is generally spoken of as "Gunnar Herse" in the Norwegian text; but where it could be done without inconvenience, the designation has here been omitted.

THE VIKINGS AT HELGELAND

PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

ACT FIRST

A rocky coast, running precipitously down to the sea at the back. To the left, a boat-house; to the right, rocks and pinewoods. The masts of two warships can be seen down in the cove. Far out to the right, the sea, dotted with reefs and skerries, on which the surf is running high; it is a stormy snow-grey winter-day.

SIGURD *comes up from the ships; he is clad in a white tunic with a silver belt, a blue cloak, cross-gartered hose, untanned brogues, and a steel cap; at his side hangs a short sword.* ÖRNULF *comes in sight immediately afterwards, high up among the rocks, clad in a dark lamb-skin tunic with a breastplate and greaves, woollen stockings, and untanned brogues; over his shoulders he has a cloak of brown frieze, with the hood drawn over his steel cap, so that his face is partly hidden. He is very tall and massively built, with a long white beard, but is somewhat bowed by age; his weapons are a round shield, sword, and spear.*

SIGURD *enters first, looks around, sees the boat-shed, goes quickly up to it, and tries to burst open the door.*

ÖRNULF.

[*Appears among the rocks, starts on seeing* SIGURD, *seems to recognise him, descends and cries:*] Give place, Viking!

SIGURD.

[*Turns, lays his hand on his sword, and answers:*] 'Twere the first time if I did!

ÖRNULF.

Thou shalt and must! I need the shelter for my stiff-frozen men.

SIGURD.

And I for a weary woman!

ÖRNULF.

My men are worth more than thy women!

SIGURD.

Then must outlaws be highly prized in Helgeland!

ÖRNULF.

[*Raising his spear.*] Thou shalt pay dear for that word!

SIGURD.

[*Drawing his sword.*] Now will it go ill with thee, old man!

[ÖRNULF *rushes upon him;* SIGURD *defends himself.*

DAGNY *and some of* SIGURD'S *men come up from the strand;* ÖRNULF'S *six sons appear on the rocks to the right.*

DAGNY.

[*Who is a little in front, clad in a red kirtle, blue cloak, and fur hood, calls down to the ships:*] Up, all Sigurd's men! My husband is fighting with a stranger!

ÖRNULF'S SONS.

Help! Help for our father! [*They descend.*

SIGURD.

[*To his men.*] Hold! I can master him alone!

ÖRNULF.

[*To his sons.*] Let me fight in peace! [*Rushes in upon* SIGURD.] I will see thy blood!

SIGURD

First see thine own!

[*Wounds him in the arm so that his spear falls.*

ÖRNULF.

A stout stroke, Viking!
Swift the sword thou swingest,
keen thy blows and biting;
Sigurd's self, the Stalwart,
stood before thee shame-struck.

SIGURD.

[*Smiling.*] Then were his shame his glory!

ÖRNULF'S SONS.

[*With a cry of wonder.*] Sigurd himself! Sigurd the Strong!

ÖRNULF.

But sharper was thy stroke that night thou didst bear away Dagny, my daughter.

[*Casts his hood back.*

SIGURD AND HIS MEN.

Örnulf of the Fiords!

DAGNY.

[*Glad, yet uneasy.*] My father and my brothers!

SIGURD.

Stand thou behind me.

ÖRNULF.

Nay, no need. [*Approaching* SIGURD.] I no sooner saw thee than I knew thee, and therefore I stirred the strife; I was fain to prove the fame that tells of thee as the stoutest man of his hands in Norway. Hereafter let peace be between us.

SIGURD.

Best if so it could be.

ÖRNULF.

Here is my hand. Thou art a warrior indeed; stouter strokes than these has old Örnulf never given or taken.

SIGURD.

[*Seizes his outstretched hand.*] Let them be the last strokes given and taken between us two; and be thou thyself the judge in the matter between us. Art willing?

ÖRNULF.

That am I, and straightway shall the quarrel be healed. [*To the others.*] Be the matter, then, known to all. Five winters ago came Sigurd and Gunnar Headman as vikings to Iceland; they lay in harbour close under my homestead. Then Gunnar, by force and craft, carried away my foster-daughter, Hiördis; but thou, Sigurd, didst take Dagny, my own child, and sailed with her over the sea. For that I now doom thee to pay three hundred pieces of silver, and thereby shall thy misdeed be atoned.

SIGURD.

Fair is thy judgment, Örnulf; the three hundred pieces will I pay, and add thereto a silken cloak fringed with gold. 'Tis a gift from King Æthelstan of England, and better has no Icelander yet borne.

DAGNY.

Well said, my brave husband; and my father, I thank thee. Now at last is my mind at ease.

[*She presses her father's and brothers' hands, and talks low to them.*

ÖRNULF.

Then thus stands the troth between us; and from this day shall Dagny be to the full as honourably regarded as though she had been lawfully betrothed to thee, with the good will of her kin.

SIGURD.

And in me canst thou trust, as in one of thine own blood.

ÖRNULF.

That I doubt not, and will forthwith prove thy friendship.

SIGURD.

Ready shalt thou find me; say, what dost thou crave?

ÖRNULF.

Thy help in rede and deed. I have sailed hither to Helgeland to seek out Gunnar Headman and call him to account for the carrying away of Hiördis.

SIGURD.

[*Surprised.*] Gunnar!

DAGNY.

[*In the same tone.*] And Hiördis—where are they?

ÖRNULF.

In Gunnar's homestead, I trow.

SIGURD.

And it is——?

ÖRNULF.

Not many bow-shots hence; did ye not know?

SIGURD.

[*With suppressed emotion.*] No, truly! I have had scant tidings of Gunnar since we sailed from Iceland

together. While I have wandered far and wide and served many outland kings, Gunnar has stayed at home. We made the land here at daydawn, storm-driven. I knew, indeed, that Gunnar's homestead lay here in the north, but——

DAGNY.

[*To* ÖRNULF.] So that errand has brought thee hither?

ÖRNULF.

That and no other. [*To* SIGURD.] Our meeting is the work of the Mighty Ones above; they willed it so. Had I wished to find thee, little knew I where to seek.

SIGURD.

[*Thoughtfully.*] True, true!—But concerning Gunnar—tell me, Örnulf, art thou minded to go sharply to work, with all thy might, be it for good or ill?

ÖRNULF.

That must I. Listen, Sigurd, for thus it stands: Last summer I rode to the Council where many honourable men were met. When the Council-days were over, I sat in the hall and drank with the men of my shire, and the talk fell upon the carrying-away of the women; scornful words they gave me, because for all these years I had let that wrong rest unavenged. Then, in my wrath, I swore to sail to Norway, seek out Gunnar, and crave reckoning or revenge, and never again to set foot in Iceland till my claim was made good.

SIGURD.

Ay, ay, since so it stands, I see well that if need be the matter must be pressed home.

ÖRNULF.

It must; but I shall not crave overmuch, and Gunnar has the fame of an honourable man. I am glad, too, that I set forth on this quest; the time lay heavy on me in Iceland; out upon the blue waters had I grown old and grey, and meseemed that I must fare forth once again before I——; well well—Bergthora, my good wife, was dead these many years; my elder sons sailed on viking-ventures summer by summer; and since Thorolf was growing up——

DAGNY.

[*Joyfully.*] Thorolf is with thee? Where is he?

ÖRNULF.

On board the ship. [*Points towards the background, to the right.*] Scarce shalt thou know the boy again, so stout and strong and fair has he grown. He will be a mighty warrior, Sigurd; one day he will equal thee.

DAGNY.

[*Smiling.*] I see it is now as ever: Thorolf stands nearest thy heart.

ÖRNULF.

He is the youngest, and like his mother; therefore it is.

SIGURD.

But tell me—thy errand to Gunnar—thinkest thou to-day——?

ÖRNULF.

Rather to-day than to-morrow. Fair amends will content me; should Gunnar say me nay, then must he abide what may follow.

KÅRE THE PEASANT *enters hastily from the right; he is clad in a grey frieze cloak and low-brimmed felt hat; he carries in his hand a broken fence-rail.*

KÅRE.

Well met, Vikings

ÖRNULF.

Vikings are seldom well met.

KÅRE.

If ye be honourable men, ye will grant me refuge among you; Gunnar Headman's house-carls are hunting me to slay me.

ÖRNULF.

Gunnar's?

SIGURD.

Then hast thou done him some wrong!

KÅRE.

I have done myself right. Our cattle grazed together upon an island, hard by the coast; Gunnar's men carried

off my best oxen, and one of them flouted me for a thrall. Then I raised my sword against him and slew him.

ÖRNULF.

That was a lawful deed.

KÅRE.

But this morning his men came in arms against me. By good hap I heard of their coming, and fled; but my foemen are on my tracks, and short shrift can I look for at their hands.

SIGURD.

Ill can I believe thee, peasant! In bygone days I knew Gunnar as I know myself, and this I wot, that never did he wrong to a peaceful man.

KÅRE.

Gunnar has no part in this wrong-doing; he is in the southland; nay, it is Hiördis his wife——

DAGNY.

Hiördis!

ÖRNULF.

[*To himself.*] Ay, ay, 'tis like her!

KÅRE.

I offered Gunnar amends for the thrall, and he was willing; but then came Hiördis, and egged her husband on with many scornful words, and hindered the peace. Since then has Gunnar gone to the south, and to-day——

SIGURD.

[*Looking out to the left.*] Here comes a band of wayfarers towards the north. Is it not——?

KÅRE.

It is Gunnar himself!

ÖRNULF.

Be of good heart; I trow I can make peace between you.

GUNNAR HEADMAN, *with several men, enters from the left. He is in peaceful attire, wearing a brown tunic, cross-gartered hose, a blue mantle, and a broad hat; he has no weapon but a small axe.*

GUNNAR.

[*Stops in surprise and uncertainty on seeing the knot of men.*] Örnulf of the Fiords! Yes, surely——!

ÖRNULF.

Thou seest aright.

GUNNAR.

[*Approaching.*] Then peace and welcome to thee in my land, if thou come in peace.

ÖRNULF.

If thy will be as mine, there shall be no strife between us.

SIGURD.

[*Standing forward.*] Well met, Gunnar!

GUNNAR.

[*Gladly.*] Sigurd—foster-brother! [*Shakes his hand.*] Now truly, since thou art here, I know that Örnulf comes in peace. [*To* ÖRNULF.] Give me thy hand, greybeard! Thy errand here in the north is lightly guessed: it concerns Hiördis, thy foster-daughter.

ÖRNULF.

As thou sayest; great wrong was done me when thou didst bear her away from Iceland without my will.

GUNNAR.

Thy claim is rightful; what the youth has marred, the man must mend. Long have I looked for thee, Örnulf, for this cause; and if amends content thee, we shall soon be at one.

SIGURD.

So deem I too. Örnulf will not press thee over hard.

GUNNAR.

[*Warmly.*] Nay, Örnulf, didst thou crave her full worth, all my goods were not enough!

ÖRNULF.

I shall go by law and usage, be sure of that. But now another matter. [*Pointing to* KÅRE.] Seest thou yonder man?

GUNNAR.

Kåre! [*To* ÖRNULF.] Thou knowest, then, that there is a strife between us?

ORNULF.

Thy men have stolen his cattle, and theft must be atoned.

GUNNAR.

Murder no less; he has slain my thrall.

KÅRE.

Because he flouted me.

GUNNAR.

I have offered thee terms of peace.

KÅRE.

But Hiördis had no mind to that, and this morning, whilst thou wert gone, she fell upon me and now hunts me to my death.

GUNNAR.

[*Angrily.*] Sayest thou true? Has she——?

KÅRE.

True, every word.

ÖRNULF.

Therefore the peasant besought me to stand by him, and that will I do.

GUNNAR.

[*After a moment's thought.*] Thou hast dealt honourably with me, Örnulf; therefore it is fit that I should

yield to thy will. Hear then, Kåre: I am willing to let the slaying of the thrall and the wrongs done toward thee quit each other.

KÅRE.

[*Gives* GUNNAR *his hand.*] It is a good offer; I am content.

ÖRNULF.

And he shall have peace for thee and thine?

GUNNAR.

Peace shall he have, both at home and wheresoever he may go.

SIGURD.

[*Pointing to the right.*] See yonder!

GUNNAR.

[*Disturbed.*] It is Hiördis!

ÖRNULF.

With armed men!

KÅRE.

She is seeking me!

HIÖRDIS *enters, with a troop of house-carls. She is clad in black, wearing a kirtle, cloak, and hood; the men are armed with swords and axes; she herself carries a light spear.*

HIÖRDIS.

[*Stops on entering.*] We meet here in force, meseems.

DAGNY.

[*Rushes to meet her.*] Peace and joy to thee, Hiördis!

HIÖRDIS.

[*Coldly.*] I thank thee.—'Twas told me thou wert not far off. [*Comes forward, looking sharply at those assembled.*] Gunnar, and—Kåre, my foeman—Örnulf and his sons, and—— [*As she catches sight of* SIGURD, *she starts almost imperceptibly, is silent a moment, but collects herself and says:*] Many I see here who are known to me—but little I know who is best minded towards me.

ÖRNULF.

We are all well-minded towards thee.

HIÖRDIS.

If so be, thou wilt not deny to give Kåre into my husband's hands.

ÖRNULF.

There is no need.

GUNNAR.

There is peace and friendship between us.

HIÖRDIS.

[*With suppressed scorn.*] Friendship? Well well, I know thou art a wise man, Gunnar! Kåre has found mighty friends, and doubtless thou deem'st it safest——

GUNNAR.

Thy taunts avail not! [*With dignity.*] Kåre is at peace for us!

HIÖRDIS.

[*Restraining herself.*] Well and good; if thou hast sworn him peace, the vow must be held.

GUNNAR.

[*Forcibly, but without anger.*] It must and it shall.

ÖRNULF.

[*To* HIÖRDIS.] Another pact had been well-nigh made ere thy coming.

HIÖRDIS.

[*Sharply.*] Between thee and Gunnar?

ÖRNULF.

[*Nods.*] It had to do with thee.

HIÖRDIS.

Well can I guess what it had to do with; but this I tell thee, foster-father, never shall it be said that Gunnar let himself be cowed because thou camest in arms to the isle. Hadst thou come alone, a single wayfarer, to our hall, the quarrel had more easily been healed.

GUNNAR.

Örnulf and his sons come in peace.

HIÖRDIS.

Mayhap; but will it sound otherwise in the mouths of men; and thou thyself, Gunnar, didst show scant trust in the peace yesterday, in sending our son Egil to the

southland so soon as it was told us that Örnulf's warship lay in the fiord.

SIGURD.

[*To* GUNNAR.] Didst thou send thy son to the south?

HIÖRDIS.

Ay, that he might be in safety should Örnulf fall upon us.

ÖRNULF.

Scoff not at that, Hiördis; what Gunnar has done may prove wise in the end, if so be thou hinder the pact.

HIÖRDIS.

Life must take its chance; come what will, I had liever die than save my life by a shameful pact.

DAGNY.

Sigurd makes atonement, and will not be deemed the lesser man for that.

HIÖRDIS.

Sigurd best knows what his own honour can bear.

SIGURD.

On that score shall I never need reminding.

HIÖRDIS.

Sigurd has done famous deeds, but bolder than all was Gunnar's deed, when he slew the white bear that guarded my bower.

GUNNAR.

[*With an embarrassed glance at* SIGURD.] Nay, nay, no more of that!

ÖRNULF.

In truth it was the boldest deed that e'er was seen in Iceland; and therefore——

SIGURD.

The more easily can Gunnar yield, and ne'er be held faint-hearted.

HIÖRDIS.

If amends are to be made, amends shall be craved as well. Bethink thee, Gunnar, of thy vow!

GUNNAR.

That vow was ill bethought; wilt thou hold me to it?

HIÖRDIS.

That will I, if we two are to dwell under one roof after this day. Know then, Örnulf, that if atonement is to be made for the carrying away of thy foster-daughter, thou, too, must atone for the slaying of Jökul my father, and the seizing of all his goods and gear.

ÖRNULF.

Jökul was slain in fair fight;[1] thy kinsmen did me a worse wrong when they sent thee to Iceland and

[1] "I ærlig holmgang." The established form of duel in the viking times was to land the combatants on one of the rocky islets or "holms" that stud the Norwegian coast, and there let them fight it out. Hence "holmgang" = duel.

beguiled me into adopting[1] thee, unwitting who thou wert.

HIÖRDIS.

Honour, and no wrong, was thy lot in fostering Jökul's daughter.

ÖRNULF.

Nought but strife hast thou brought me, that I know.

HIÖRDIS.

Sterner strife may be at hand, if——

ÖRNULF.

I came not hither to bandy words with women!—Gunnar, hear my last word: art willing to make atonement?

HIÖRDIS.

[*To* GUNNAR.] Think of thy vow!

GUNNAR.

[*To* ÖRNULF.] Thou hearest, I have sworn a vow, and that must I——

ÖRNULF.

[*Irritated.*] Enough, enough! Never shall it be said that I made atonement for slaying in fair fight.

HIÖRDIS.

[*Forcibly.*] Then we defy thee and thine.

[1] "At knæsætte" = to knee-set a child, to take it on one's knee, an irrevocable form of adoption.

ÖRNULF.

[*In rising wrath.*] And who has the right to crave atonement for Jökul? Where are his kinsmen? There is none alive! Where is his lawful avenger?

HIÖRDIS.

That is Gunnar, on my behalf.

ÖRNULF.

Gunnar! Ay, hadst thou been betrothed to him with thy foster-father's good-will, or had he made atonement for carrying thee away, then were he thy father's lawful avenger; but——

DAGNY.

[*Apprehensive and imploring.*] Father, father!

SIGURD.

[*Quickly.*] Speak it not!

ÖRNULF.

[*Raising his voice.*] Nay, loudly shall it be spoken! A woman wedded by force has no lawful husband!

GUNNAR.

[*Vehemently.*] Örnulf!

HIÖRDIS.

[*In a wild outburst.*] Flouted and shamed! [*In a quivering voice.*] This—this shalt thou come to rue!

ÖRNULF.

[*Continuing.*] A woman wedded by force is in law no more than a leman! Wilt thou regain thine honour, then must thou——

HIÖRDIS.

[*Controlling herself.*] Nay, Örnulf, I know better what is fitting. If I am to be held as Gunnar's leman —well and good, then must he win me honour by his deeds—by deeds so mighty that my shame shall be shame no more! And thou, Örnulf, beware! Here our ways part, and from this day shall I make war at all times upon thee and thine; thou shalt know no safety for life or limb, thou, nor any whom thou—— [*Looking fiercely at* KÅRE.] Kåre! Örnulf has stood thy friend, forsooth, and there is peace between us; but I counsel thee not to seek thy home yet awhile; the man thou slewest has many avengers, and it well might befall—— See, I have shown thee the danger; thou must e'en take what follows. Come, Gunnar, we must gird ourselves for the fight. A famous deed didst thou do in Iceland, but greater deeds must be done here, if thou wouldst not have thy—thy leman shrink with shame from thee and from herself!

GUNNAR.

Curb thyself, Hiördis; it is unseemly to bear thee thus!

DAGNY.

[*Imploringly.*] Stay, foster-sister—stay; I will appease my father.

HIÖRDIS.

[*Without listening to her.*] Homewards, homewards! Who could have foretold me that I should wear out my life as a worthless leman? But if I am to bear this life of shame, ay, even for one day more, then must my husband do such a deed—such a deed as shall make his name more famous than all other names of men.

[*Goes out to the right.*

GUNNAR.

[*Softly.*] Sigurd, promise me this, that we shall have speech together ere thou leave the land.

[*Goes out with his men to the right.*

[*The storm has meanwhile ceased; the midday sun is now visible, like a red disc, low upon the rim of the sea.*

ÖRNULF.

[*Threateningly.*] Thou shalt pay dear for this day's work, foster-daughter!

DAGNY.

Father, father! Surely thou wilt not harm her!

ÖRNULF.

Let me be! Now, Sigurd, now can no amends avail between Gunnar and me.

SIGURD.

What thinkest thou to do?

ÖRNULF.

That I know not; but far and wide shall the tale be told how Örnulf of the Fiords came to Gunnar's hall.

SIGURD.

[*With quiet determination.*] Maybe; but this I tell thee, Örnulf, thou shalt never bear arms against him so long as I am alive.

ÖRNULF.

So, so! And what if nought else be my will?

SIGURD.

It shall not be—let thy will be never so strong.

ÖRNULF.

[*Angrily.*] Go then; join thou with my foes; I dare outface the twain of you!

SIGURD.

Hear me out, Örnulf; the day shall never dawn that shall see thee and me at strife. There is honourable peace between us, Dagny is dearer to me than weapons or gold, and never shall I forget that thou art her nearest kinsman.

ÖRNULF.

There I know thee again, brave Sigurd!

SIGURD.

But Gunnar is my foster-brother; we have sworn each other faith and friendship. Both in war and peace have

we faced fortune together, and of all men he is dearest to me. Stout though he be, he loves not war;—but as for me, ye know, all of you, that I shrink not from strife; yet here I stand forth, Örnulf, and pray for peace on Gunnar's behalf. Let me have my will!

ÖRNULF.

I cannot; I should be a scoff to all brave men, were I to fare empty-handed back to Iceland.

SIGURD.

Thou shalt not fare empty-handed. Here in the cove my two long-ships are lying, with all the wealth I have won in my viking-ventures. There are many costly gifts from outland kings, good weapons by the chestful, and other priceless chattels. Take thou one of the ships; choose which thou wilt, and it shall be thine with all it contains—be that the atonement for Hiördis, and let Gunnar be at peace.

ÖRNULF.

Brave Sigurd, wilt thou do this for Gunnar?

SIGURD.

For a faithful friend, no man can do too much.

ÖRNULF.

Give half thy goods and gear!

SIGURD.

[*Urgently.*] Take the whole, take both my ships, take all that is mine, and let me fare with thee to Iceland

as the poorest man in thy train. What I give, I can win once more; but if thou and Gunnar come to strife, I shall never see a glad day again. Now, Örnulf, thy answer?

ÖRNULF.

[*Reflecting.*] Two good long-ships, weapons, and other chattels—too much gear can no man have; but —— [*Vehemently.*] No, no! — Hiördis has threatened me; I will not! I were dishonoured should I take thy goods!

SIGURD.

Yet listen——

ÖRNULF.

No, I say! I must fight for my own right, be my fortune what it may.

KÅRE.

[*Approaching.*] Right friendly is Sigurd's rede, but if thou wilt indeed fight thine own battle with all thy might, I can counsel thee better. Dream not of atonement so long as Hiördis has aught to say; but revenge can be thine if thou wilt hearken to me.

ÖRNULF.

Revenge? What dost thou counsel?

SIGURD.

Evil, I can well see!

DAGNY.

[*To* ÖRNULF.] Oh, do not hear him!

KÅRE.

Hiördis has declared me an outlaw; she will set snares for my life; do thou swear to see me scatheless, and this night will I burn Gunnar's hall and all within it. Is that to thy mind?

SIGURD.

Dastard!

ÖRNULF.

[*Quietly.*] To my mind? Knowest thou, Kåre, what were more to my mind? [*In a voice of thunder.*] To hew off thy nose and ears, thou vile thrall. Little dost thou know old Örnulf if thou thinkest to have his help in such a deed of shame!

KÅRE.

[*Who has shrunk backwards.*] If thou fall not upon Gunnar he will surely fall upon thee.

ÖRNULF.

Have I not weapons, and strength to wield them?

SIGURD.

[*To* KARE.] And now away with thee! Thy presence is a shame to honourable men!

KÅRE.

[*Going off.*] Well well, I must shift for myself as best I may. But this I tell you: if ye think to deal gently with Hiördis, ye will come to rue it. I know her—and I know where to strike her sorest!

[*Goes down towards the shore.*

DAGNY.

He is hatching some revenge. Sigurd, it must be hindered!

ÖRNULF.

[*Angrily.*] Nay, let him do as he will; she is worth no better!

DAGNY.

That meanest thou not; bethink thee, she is thy foster-child.

ÖRNULF.

Woe worth the day when I took her under my roof! Jökul's words begin to come true.

SIGURD.

Jökul's?

ÖRNULF.

Ay, her father's. When I gave him his death-wound he fell back upon the sward, and fixed his eyes on me and sang:

> Jökul's kin for Jökul's slayer
> many a woe shall still be weaving;
> Jökul's hoard whoe'er shall harry
> thence shall harvest little gladness.

When he had sung that, he was silent awhile, and laughed; and thereupon he died.

SIGURD.

Why should'st thou heed his words?

ÖRNULF.

Who knows? The story goes, and many believe it, that Jökul gave his children a wolf's heart to eat, that they might be fierce and fell; and Hiördis has surely had her share, that one can well see. [*Breaks off on looking out towards the right.*] Gunnar!—Do we two meet again!

GUNNAR.

[*Enters.*] Ay, Örnulf, think of me what thou wilt, but I cannot part from thee as thy foe.

ÖRNULF.

What is thy purpose?

GUNNAR.

To hold out the hand of peace to thee ere thou depart. Hear me all of you: go with me to my homestead, and be my guests as long as ye will. We lack not meat or drink or sleeping-room, and there shall be no talk of our quarrel either to-day or to-morrow.

SIGURD.

But Hiördis——?

GUNNAR.

Yields to my will; she changed her thought on the homeward way, and deemed, as I did, that we would soon be at one if ye would but be our guests.

DAGNY.

Yes, yes; let it be so.

SIGURD.

[*Doubtfully.*] But I know not if——

DAGNY.

Gunnar is thy foster-brother; little I know thee if thou say him nay.

GUNNAR.

[*To* SIGURD.] Thou hast been my friend where'er we fared; thou wilt not thwart me now!

DAGNY.

And to depart from the land, leaving Hiördis with hate in her heart—no, no, that must we not!

GUNNAR.

I have done Örnulf a great wrong; until it is made good, I cannot be at peace with myself.

SIGURD.

[*Vehemently.*] All else will I do for thee, Gunnar, but not stay here! [*Mastering himself.*] I am King Æthelstan's sworn henchman, and I must be with him in England ere the winter is out.

DAGNY.

But that thou canst be, none the less!

GUNNAR.

No man can know what lot awaits him; mayhap this is our last meeting, Sigurd, and thou wilt repent that thou didst not stand by me to the end.

DAGNY.

And long will it be ere thou see me glad again, if thou set sail to-day.

SIGURD.

[*Determined.*] Well, be it so! It shall be as ye will, although—— But no more of that; here is my hand; I will stay to feast with thee and Hiördis.

GUNNAR.

[*Shakes his hand.*] I knew it, Sigurd, and I thank thee.—And thou, Örnulf, say'st thou likewise?

ÖRNULF.

[*Gruffly.*] I shall think upon it. Bitterly has Hiördis galled me;—I will not answer to-day.

GUNNAR.

It is well, old warrior; Sigurd and Dagny will know how to smooth thy brow. Now must I prepare the feast; peace be with you the while, and well met in my hall. [*Goes out by the right.*

SIGURD.

[*To himself.*] Hiördis has changed her thought, said he? Little he knows her; I rather deem that she is plotting—— [*Interrupting himself and turning to his men.*] Come, follow me all to the ships; good gifts will I choose for Gunnar and his household.

DAGNY.

Gifts of the best we have. And thou, father—thou shalt have no peace for me until thou yield thee.

[*She goes with* SIGURD *and his men down towards the shore at the back.*

ÖRNULF.

Yield me? Ay, if there were no women-folk in Gunnar's house, then—— Oh, if I but knew where to strike her!—Thorolf, thou here!

THOROLF.

[*Who has entered hastily.*] As thou seest. Is it true that thou hast met with Gunnar?

ÖRNULF.

Yes.

THOROLF.

And art at strife with him?

ÖRNULF.

H'm—with Hiördis, at least.

THOROLF.

Then be of good cheer; soon shalt thou be avenged!

ÖRNULF.

Avenged? Who shall avenge me?

THOROLF.

Listen: as I stood on board the ship, there came a man running, with a staff in his hand, and called to me: "If thou be of Örnulf's shipfolk, then greet him from Kåre the Peasant, and say that now will I avenge the twain of us." Thereupon he took a boat and rowed away, saying as he passed: "Twenty outlaws are at haven in the fiord; with them I fare southward, and ere eventide shall Hiördis be childless.

ÖRNULF.

He said that! Ha, now I understand; Gunnar has sent his son away; Kåre is at feud with him——

THOROLF.

And now he is rowing southward to slay the boy!

ÖRNULF.

[*With sudden resolution.*] Up, all! That booty will we fight for!

THOROLF.

What wilt thou do?

ÖRNULF.

Leave that to me; it shall be I, and not Kåre, that will take revenge!

THOROLF.

I will go with thee!

ÖRNULF.

Nay, do thou follow with Sigurd and thy sister to Gunnar's hall.

THOROLF.

Sigurd? Is he in the isle?

ÖRNULF.

There may'st thou see his warships; we are at one—do thou go with him.

THOROLF.

Among thy foes?

ÖRNULF.

Go thou to the feast. Now shall Hiördis learn to know old Örnulf! But hark thee, Thorolf, to no one must thou speak of what I purpose; dost hear? to no one!

THOROLF.

I promise.

ÖRNULF.

[*Takes his hand and looks at him affectionately.*] Farewell then, my fair boy; bear thee in courtly wise at the feast-house, that I may have honour of thee. Beware of idle babbling; but what thou sayest, let it be keen as a sword. Be friendly to those that deal with thee in friendly wise; but if thou be taunted, hold not thy peace. Drink not more than thou canst bear; but put not the horn aside when it is offered thee in measure, lest thou be deemed womanish.

THOROLF.

Nay, be at ease!

ÖRNULF.

Then away to the feast at Gunnar's hall. I too will come to the feast, and that in the guise they least think of. [*Blithely to the rest.*] Come, my wolf-cubs; be your fangs keen;—now shall ye have blood to drink.

[*He goes off with his elder sons to the right, at the back.*

SIGURD *and* DAGNY *come up from the ships, richly dressed for the banquet. They are followed by two men, carrying a chest, who lay it down and return as they came.*

THOROLF.

[*Looking out after his father.*] Now fare they all forth to fight, and I must stay behind; it is hard to be the youngest of the house.—Dagny! all hail and greetings to thee, sister mine!

DAGNY.

Thorolf! All good powers!—thou art a man, grown!

THOROLF.

That may I well be, forsooth, in five years——

DAGNY.

Ay, true, true.

SIGURD.

[*Giving him his hand.*] In thee will Örnulf find a stout carl, or I mistake me.

THOROLF.

Would he but prove me——!

DAGNY.

[*Smiling.*] He spares thee more than thou hast a mind to? Thou wast ever well-nigh too dear to him.

SIGURD.

Whither has he gone?

THOROLF.

Down to his ship;—go you on; he will follow.

SIGURD.

I await my men; they are mooring my ships and bringing ashore wares.

THOROLF.

There must I lend a hand!

[*Goes down towards the shore.*

SIGURD.

[*After a moment's reflection.*] Dagny, my wife, now that we are alone, I have that to tell thee which must no longer be hidden.

DAGNY.

[*Surprised.*] What meanest thou?

SIGURD.

There may be danger in this faring to Gunnar's hall.

DAGNY.

Danger? Thinkest thou that Gunnar——?

SIGURD.

Nay, Gunnar is brave and true—yet better had it been that I had sailed from the isle without crossing his threshold.

DAGNY.

Thou makest me fear! Sigurd, what is amiss?

SIGURD.

First answer me this: the golden ring that I gave thee, where hast thou it?

DAGNY.

[*Showing it.*] Here, on my arm; thou badest me wear it.

SIGURD.

Cast it to the bottom of the sea, so deep that none may ever set eyes on it again; else may it be the bane of many men!

DAGNY.

The ring!

SIGURD.

[*In a low voice.*] That night when we bore away the twain of you—dost remember?

DAGNY.

Do I remember!

SIGURD.

It is of that I would speak.

DAGNY.

[*In suspense.*] What is it? Say on!

SIGURD.

Thou knowest there had been a feast; thou didst seek thy chamber betimes; but Hiördis still sat among the men in the feast-hall. The horn went busily round, and many a great vow was sworn. I swore to bear away a fair maid with me from Iceland; Gunnar swore the same as I, and passed the cup to Hiördis. She grasped it and stood up, and vowed this vow, that no warrior should

have her to wife, save him who should go to her bower, slay the white bear that stood bound at the door, and carry her away in his arms.

DAGNY.

Yes, yes; all this I know!

SIGURD.

All men deemed that it might not be, for the bear was the fiercest of beasts; none but Hiördis might come near it, and it had the strength of twenty men.

DAGNY.

But Gunnar slew it, and by that deed won fame throughout all lands.

SIGURD.

[*In a low voice.*] He won the fame—but—I did the deed!

DAGNY.

[*With a cry.*] Thou!

SIGURD.

When the men left the feast-hall, Gunnar prayed me to come with him alone to our sleeping-place. Then said he: "Hiördis is dearer to me than all women; without her I cannot live." I answered him: "Then go to her bower; thou knowest the vow she hath sworn." But he said: "Life is dear to him that loves; if I should assail the bear, the end were doubtful, and I am loath to lose my life, for then should I lose Hiördis too." Long

did we talk, and the end was that Gunnar made ready his ship, while I drew my sword, took Gunnar's harness upon me, and went to the bower.

DAGNY.

[*With pride and joy.*] And thou—thou didst slay the bear!

SIGURD.

I slew him. In the bower it was dark as under a raven's wing; Hiördis deemed it was Gunnar that sat by her—she was heated with the mead—she drew a ring from her arm and gave it to me—it is that thou wearest now.

DAGNY.

[*Hesitating.*] And thou wast alone that night with Hiördis in her bower?

SIGURD.

My sword lay drawn between us. [*A short pause.*] Ere the dawn, I bore Hiördis to Gunnar's ship; she dreamed not of our guile, and he sailed away with her. Then went I to thy sleeping-place and found thee there among thy women;—what followed, thou knowest; I sailed from Iceland with a fair maid, as I had sworn, and from that day hast thou stood faithfully at my side whithersoever I have wandered.

DAGNY.

[*Much moved.*] My brave husband! And that great deed was thine!—Oh, I should have known it; it could have been none else! Hiördis, that proud and stately

woman, couldst thou have won, yet didst choose me! Now wouldst thou be tenfold dearer to me, wert thou not already dearer than all the world.

SIGURD.

Dagny, my sweet wife, now thou knowest all—that need be known. I could not but warn thee; for that ring—Hiördis must never see it! Wouldst thou do my will, then cast it from thee—into the depths of the sea.

DAGNY.

Nay, Sigurd, it is too dear to me; is it not thy gift? But be at ease, I will hide it from every eye, and never shall I breathe a word of what thou hast told me.

THOROLF *comes up from the ships, with* SIGURD'S *men.*

THOROLF.

All is ready for the feast.

DAGNY.

Come then, Sigurd—my brave, my noble warrior!

SIGURD.

Beware, Dagny—beware! With t h e e it rests now whether this meeting shall end in peace or in blood. [*Cheerfully to the others.*] Away then, to the feast in Gunnar's hall!

[*Goes out with* DAGNY *to the right; the others follow.*

ACT SECOND.

The feast-room in GUNNAR'S *house. The entrance-door is in the back; smaller doors in the side-walls. In front, on the left, the greater high-seat; opposite it, on the right, the lesser. In the middle of the floor, a wood fire is burning on a built-up hearth. In the background, on both sides of the door, are daïses for the women of the household. From each of the high-seats, a long table, with benches, stretches backwards, parallel with the wall. It is dark outside; the fire lights the room.*

HIÖRDIS *and* DAGNY *enter from the right.*

DAGNY.

Nay, Hiördis, it passes my wit to understand thee. Thou hast shown me all the house; I know not what thing thou lackest, and all thou hast is fair and goodly; —then why bemoan thy lot?

HIÖRDIS.

Cage an eagle and it will bite at the wires, be they of iron or of gold.

DAGNY.

In one thing at least thou art richer than I; thou hast Egil, thy little son.

HIÖRDIS.

Better no child, than one born in shame.

DAGNY.

In shame?

HIÖRDIS.

Dost thou forget thy father's saying? Egil is the son of a leman; that was his word.

DAGNY.

A word spoken in wrath—why wilt thou heed it?

HIÖRDIS.

Nay, nay, ÖRNULF was right; Egil is weak; one can see he is no freeborn child.

DAGNY.

Hiördis, how canst thou——?

HIÖRDIS.

[*Unheeding.*] Doubt not that shame can be sucked into the blood, like the venom of a snake-bite. Of another mettle are the freeborn sons of mighty men. I have heard of a queen that took her son and sewed his kirtle fast to his flesh, yet he never blinked an eye. [*With an evil look.*] Dagny, that will I try with Egil!

DAGNY.

[*Horrified.*] Hiördis, Hiördis!

HIÖRDIS.

[*Laughing.*] Ha-ha-ha! Dost thou think I meant my words? [*Changing her tone.*] But, believe me or not as thou wilt, there are times when such deeds seem to lure me. Doubtless it is in my blood—for I am of the race of the Jötuns,[1] they say.—Come, sit thou here, Dagny. Far hast thou wandered in these five long years; tell me, thou hast ofttimes been a guest in the halls of kings?

DAGNY.

Many a time—and chiefly with Æthelstan of England.

HIÖRDIS.

And everywhere thou hast been held in honour, and hast sat in the highest seats at the board?

DAGNY.

Doubtless. As Sigurd's wife——

HIÖRDIS.

Ay, ay—a famous man is Sigurd—though Gunnar stands above him.

DAGNY.

Gunnar?

HIÖRDIS.

One deed did Gunnar do that Sigurd shrank from. But let that be! Tell me, when Sigurd went a-viking and thou with him, when thou didst hear the sword-blades sing in the fierce war-game, when the blood

[1] The giants or Titans of Scandinavian mythology.

streamed red on the deck—came there not over thee an untameable longing to plunge into the strife? Didst thou not don harness and take up arms?

DAGNY.

Never! How canst thou think it? I, a woman!

HIÖRDIS.

A woman, a woman,—who knows what a woman may do!—But one thing thou canst tell me, Dagny, for that thou surely knowest: when a man clasps to his breast the woman he loves—is it true that her blood burns, that her bosom throbs—that she swoons in a strange ecstasy?

DAGNY.

[*Blushing.*] Hiördis, how canst thou——!

HIÖRDIS.

Come, tell me——!

DAGNY.

Surely thou thyself hast known it.

HIÖRDIS.

Ay once, and only once; it was that night when Gunnar sat with me in my bower; he crushed me in his arms till my byrnie[1] burst, and then, then——!

DAGNY.

[*Exclaiming.*] What! Sigurd——!

[1] Breastplate.

HIÖRDIS.

Sigurd? What of Sigurd? I spoke of Gunnar—that night when he bore me away——

DAGNY.

[*Collecting herself.*] Yes, yes, I remember.—I know well——

HIÖRDIS.

That was the only time; never, never again! I deemed I was bewitched; for that Gunnar could so clasp a woman—— [*Stops and looks at* DAGNY.] What ails thee? Methinks thou turnest pale and red!

DAGNY.

Nay, nay!

HIÖRDIS.

[*Without heeding her.*] Aye, the merry viking-raid should have been my lot; it had been better for me, and —mayhap for all of us. That were life, full and rich life! Dost thou not wonder, Dagny, to find me here alive? Art not afraid to be alone with me in the hall, thus in the dark? Deem'st thou not that I must have died in all these years, and that it is my ghost that stands at thy side?

DAGNY.

[*Painfully ill at ease.*] Come—let us go—to the others.

HIÖRDIS.

[*Seizing her by the arm.*] No, stay! Seems it not strange to thee, Dagny, that any woman can yet live who has spent here five such nights?

DAGNY.

Five nights?

HIÖRDIS.

Here in the north each night is a whole winter long. [*Quickly and with an altered expression.*] Yet the place is fair enough, doubt it not! Thou shalt see sights here such as thou hast not seen in the halls of the English king. We shall be together as sisters whilst thou bidest with me; we shall go down to the sea when the storm blows up afresh; thou shalt see the billows racing to the land like wild, white-maned horses. And then the whales far out in the offing! They dash one against another like steel-clad warriors! Ha, what joy to be a witch-wife and ride on a whale's back—to speed before the bark, and wake the storm, and lure men to the deeps with lovely songs of sorcery!

DAGNY.

Fie, Hiördis, how canst thou speak such things!

HIÖRDIS.

Canst t h o u sing sorceries, Dagny?

DAGNY.

[*With horror.*] I!

HIÖRDIS.

I trow thou canst; how else didst thou lure Sigurd to thee?

DAGNY.

Thy speech is shameful; let me go!

HIÖRDIS.

[*Holding her back.*] Because I jest! Nay, hear me to the end! Think, Dagny, what it is to sit by the window in the eventide and hear the kelpie [1] wailing in the boat-house; to sit waiting and listening for the dead men's ride to Valhal; for their way lies past us here in the north. They are the brave men that fell in fight, the strong women that did not drag out their lives tamely, like thee and me; they sweep through the air in cloud-rack and storm, on their black horses, with jangling bells! [*Embraces* DAGNY, *and presses her wildly in her arms.*] Ha, Dagny! think of riding the last ride on so rare a steed!

DAGNY.

[*Struggling to escape.*] Hiördis, Hiördis! Let me go! I will not hear thee!

HIÖRDIS.

[*Laughing.*] Weak art thou of heart, and easily affrighted.

GUNNAR *enters from the back, with* SIGURD *and* THOROLF.

GUNNAR.

Now, truly, are all things to my very mind! I have found thee again, Sigurd, my brave brother, as kind and true as of old. I have Örnulf's son under my roof, and the old man himself follows speedily after; is it not so?

THOROLF.

So he promised.

[1] "Draugen," a vague and horrible sea-monster.

GUNNAR.

Then all I lack is that Egil should be here.

THOROLF.

'Tis plain thou lovest the boy, thou namest him so oft.

GUNNAR.

Truly I love him; he is my only child; and he is like to grow up fair and kindly.

HIÖRDIS.

But no warrior.

GUNNAR.

Nay—that thou must not say.

SIGURD.

How couldst thou send him from thee——

GUNNAR.

Would that I had not! [*In an undertone.*] But thou knowest, Sigurd, he who loves overmuch, takes not always the manliest part. [*Aloud.*] I had few men in my house, and none could be sure of his life when it was known that Örnulf lay in the cove with a ship of war.

HIÖRDIS.

One thing I know that ought first to be made safe, life afterwards.

THOROLF.

And that is——?

HIÖRDIS.

Honour and fame among men.

GUNNAR.

Hiördis!

SIGURD.

It shall not be said of Gunnar that he has tainted his honour by doing this.

GUNNAR.

[*Sternly.*] No one shall make strife between me and Örnulf's kinsfolk!

HIÖRDIS.

[*Smiling.*] Tell me, Sigurd—can thy ship sail with any wind?

SIGURD.

Ay, when 'tis cunningly steered.

HIÖRDIS.

Good! I too will steer my ship cunningly, and make my way whither I will. [*Retires towards the back.*

DAGNY.

[*Whispers, uneasily.*] Sigurd, let us hence—this very night!

SIGURD.

It is too late now; 'twas thou that——

DAGNY.

Then I held Hiördis dear; but now——; I have heard her speak words I shudder to think of.

SIGURD'S *men, with other guests, men and women, housecarls and handmaidens, enter from the back.*

GUNNAR.

[*After a short pause, in which greetings and the like are exchanged.*] Now to the board! My chief guest, Örnulf of the Fiords, comes later; so Thorolf promises.

HIÖRDIS.

[*To the house-folk.*] Pass the ale and mead around, that hearts may wax merry and tongues may be loosed.

[GUNNAR *leads* SIGURD *to the high-seat on the right.* DAGNY *seats herself on* SIGURD'S *right,* HIÖRDIS *opposite him, at the other side of the same table.* THOROLF *is in like manner ushered to a place at the other table, and thus sits opposite* GUNNAR, *who occupies the greater high-seat. The others take their seats further back.*

HIÖRDIS.

[*After a pause in which they drink with each other and converse quietly across the tables.*] It seldom chances that so many brave men are seated together, as I see to-night in our hall. It were fitting, then, that we should essay the old pastime: Let each man name the chief of his deeds, that all may judge which is the mightiest.

GUNNAR.

That is an ill custom at a drinking-feast; 'twill oft breed strife.

HIÖRDIS.

Little did I deem that Gunnar was afraid.

SIGURD.

That no one deems; but it were long ere we came to an end, were we all to tell of our deeds, so many as we be. Do thou rather tell us, Gunnar, of thy journey to Biarmeland; 'tis no small exploit to fare so far to the north, and gladly would we hear of it.

HIÖRDIS.

The journey to Biarmeland is chapman's work, and little worthy to be named among warriors. Nay, do thou begin, Sigurd, if thou wouldst not have me deem that thou canst ill endure to hear my husband's praise! Say on; name that one of thy deeds which thou dost prize the highest.

SIGURD.

Well, since thou wilt have it so, so must it be. Let it be told, then, that I lay a-viking among the Orkneys; there came foemen against us, but we swept them from their ships, and I fought alone against eight men.

HIÖRDIS.

Good was that deed; but wert thou fully armed?

SIGURD.

Fully armed, with axe, spear, and sword.

HIÖRDIS.

Still the deed was good. Now must thou, my husband, name that which thou deemest the chief among thy exploits.

GUNNAR.

[*Unwillingly.*] I slew two berserkers who had seized a merchant-ship; and thereupon I sent the captive chapmen home, giving them their ship freely, without ransom. The King of England deemed well of that deed; he said that I had done honourably, and gave me thanks and good gifts.

HIÖRDIS.

Nay, truly, Gunnar, a better deed than that couldst thou name.

GUNNAR.

[*Vehemently.*] I will take praise for no other deed! Since last I fared from Iceland I have lived at peace and traded in merchandise. No word more on this matter!

HIÖRDIS.

If thou thyself wilt hide thy renown, thy wife shall speak.

GUNNAR.

Peace, Hiördis—I command thee!

HIÖRDIS.

Sigurd fought with eight men, being fully armed; Gunnar came to my bower in the black night, slew the

bear that had twenty men's strength, and yet had but a short sword in his hand.

GUNNAR.

[*Violently agitated.*] Woman, not a word more!

DAGNY.

[*Softly.*] Sigurd, wilt thou endure——?

SIGURD.

[*Likewise.*] Be still!

HIÖRDIS.

[*To the company.*] And now, ye brave men—which is the mightier, Sigurd or Gunnar?

GUNNAR.

Silence!

HIÖRDIS.

[*Loudly.*] Speak out; I have the right to crave judgment.

AN OLD MAN.

[*Among the guests.*] If the truth be told, then is Gunnar's deed greater than all other deeds of men; Gunnar is the mightiest warrior, and Sigurd is second to him.

GUNNAR.

[*With a glance across the table.*] Ah, Sigurd, Sigurd, didst thou but know——!

DAGNY.

[*Softly.*] It is too much—friend though he be!

SIGURD.

Peace, wife! [*Aloud, to the others.*] Ay, truly, Gunnar is the most honourable of all men; so would I esteem him to my dying day, even had he never done that deed; for that I hold more lightly than ye.

HIÖRDIS.

There speaks thy envy, Sigurd Viking!

SIGURD.

[*Smiling.*] Mightily dost thou mistake. [*Kindly, to* GUNNAR, *drinking to him across the table.*] Hail, noble Gunnar; our friendship shall stand fast, whosoever may seek to break it.

HIÖRDIS.

No one, that I wot of, has such a thought.

SIGURD.

Say not so; I could almost think thou hadst bidden us to the feast in the hope to stir up strife.

HIÖRDIS.

That is like thee, Sigurd; now art thou wroth that thou may'st not be held the mightiest man at the board!

SIGURD.

I have ever esteemed Gunnar more highly than myself.

HIÖRDIS.

Well, well—second to Gunnar is still a good place, and ——[*with a side glance at* THOROLF] had Örnulf been here, he could have had the third seat.

THOROLF.

Then would Jökul, thy father, find a low place indeed; for he fell before Örnulf.

[*The following dispute is carried on, by both parties, with rising and yet repressed irritation.*

HIÖRDIS.

That shalt thou never say! Örnulf is a skald, and men whisper that he has praised himself for greater deeds than he has done.

THOROLF.

Then woe to him who whispers so loudly that it comes to my ear!

HIÖRDIS.

[*With a smile of provocation.*] Wouldst thou avenge it?

THOROLF.

Ay, so that my vengeance should be told of far and wide.

HIÖRDIS.

Then here I pledge a cup to this, that thou may'st first have a beard on thy chin.

THOROLF.

Even a beardless lad is too good to wrangle with women.

HIÖRDIS.

But too weak to fight with men; therefore thy father let thee lie by the hearth at home in Iceland, whilst thy brothers went a-viking.

THOROLF.

It had been well had he kept as good an eye on thee; for then hadst thou not left the land an unwedded woman.

GUNNAR AND SIGURD.

Thorolf!

DAGNY.

[*Simultaneously.*] Brother!

HIÖRDIS.

[*Softly, and quivering with rage.*] Ha! wait—wait!

THOROLF.

[*Gives* GUNNAR *his hand.*] Be not wroth, Gunnar;—evil words came to my tongue; but thy wife goaded me!

DAGNY.

[*Softly and imploringly.*] Foster-sister, by any love thou hast ever borne me, stir not up strife!

HIÖRDIS.

[*Laughing.*] Jests must pass at the feast-board, if the merriment is to thrive.

GUNNAR.

[*Who has been talking softly to* THOROLF.] Thou art a brave lad! [*Hands him a sword which hangs beside the high-seat.*] Here, Thorolf, here is a good gift for thee. Wield it well, and let us be friends.

HIÖRDIS.

Beware how thou givest away thy weapons, Gunnar; men may say thou dost part with things thou canst not use!

THOROLF.

[*Who has meanwhile examined the sword.*] Thanks for the gift, Gunnar; it shall never be drawn in an unworthy cause.

HIÖRDIS.

If thou wilt keep that promise, then do thou never lend the sword to thy brothers.

GUNNAR.

Hiördis!

HIÖRDIS.

[*Continuing.*] Neither let it hang on thy father's wall; for there it would hang with base men's weapons.

THOROLF.

True enough, Hiördis—for there thy father's axe and shield have hung this many a year.

HIÖRDIS.

[*Mastering herself.*] That Örnulf slew my father—that deed is ever on thy tongue; but if report speak true, 'twas scarce so honourable a deed as thou deemest.

THOROLF.

Of what report dost thou speak?

HIÖRDIS.

[*Smiling.*] I dare not name it, for it would make thee wroth.

THOROLF.

Then hold thy peace—I ask no better.

[*Turns from her.*

HIÖRDIS.

Nay, why should I not tell it? Is it true, Thorolf, that for three nights thy father sat in woman's weed, doing sorceries with the witch of Smalserhorn, ere he dared face Jökul in fight?

[*All rise; violent excitement among the guests.*

GUNNAR, SIGURD, AND DAGNY.

Hiördis!

THOROLF.

[*Bitterly exasperated.*] So base a lie has no man spoken of Örnulf of the Fiords! Thou thyself hast made it, for no one less venomous than thou could dream of such a thing. The blackest crime a man can do hast thou laid at my father's door. [*Throwing the sword away.*] There, Gunnar, take thy gift again; I can take nought from that house wherein my father is reviled.

GUNNAR.

Thorolf, hear me——!

THOROLF.

Let me go! But beware both thou and Hiördis; for my father has now in his power one whom ye hold dearest of all!

HIÖRDIS.

[*Starting.*] Thy father has——!

GUNNAR.

[*With a cry.*] What sayest thou?

SIGURD.

[*Vehemently.*] Where is Örnulf?

THOROLF.

[*With mocking laughter.*] Gone southward—with my brothers.

GUNNAR.

Southward!

HIÖRDIS.

[*Shrieking.*] Gunnar! Örnulf has slain Egil, our son.

GUNNAR.

Slain!—Egil slain! Then woe to Örnulf and all his race! Thorolf, speak out;—is this true?

SIGURD.

Gunnar, Gunnar—hear me!

GUNNAR.

Speak out, if thou care for thy life!

THOROLF.

Thou canst not fright me! Wait till my father comes; he shall plant a mark of shame over against Gunnar's house! And meanwhile, Hiördis, do thou cheer thee with these words I heard to-day: "Ere eventide shall Gunnar and his wife be childless."

[*Goes out by the back.*

GUNNAR.

[*In agony.*] Slain—slain! My little Egil slain!

HIÖRDIS.

[*Wildly.*] And thou—dost thou let him go? Let Egil, thy child, lie unavenged! Then wert thou the dastard of dastards——!

GUNNAR.

[*As if beside himself.*] A sword—an axe! 'Tis the last tidings he shall ever bring!

[*Seizes an axe from one of the bystanders and rushes out.*

SIGURD.

[*About to follow.*] Gunnar, hold thy hand!

HIÖRDIS.

[*Holding him back.*] Stay, stay! The men will part them; I know Gunnar!

[*A cry from the crowd, which has flocked together at the main door.*

SIGURD AND DAGNY.

What is it?

A VOICE AMONG THE CROWD.

Thorolf has fallen.

SIGURD.

Thorolf! Ha, let me go!

DAGNY.

My brother! Oh, my brother!

[SIGURD *is on the point of rushing out. At the same moment, the crowd parts,* GUNNAR *enters, and throws down the axe at the door.*

GUNNAR.

Now it is done. Egil is avenged!

SIGURD.

Well for thee if thy hand has not been too hasty.

GUNNAR.

Mayhap, mayhap; but Egil, Egil, my fair boy!

HIÖRDIS.

Now must we arm us, and seek help among our friends; for Thorolf has many avengers.

GUNNAR.

[*Gloomily.*] He will be his own worst avenger; he will be with me night and day.

HIÖRDIS.

Thorolf got his reward. Kinsmen must suffer for kinsmen's deeds.

GUNNAR.

True, true; but this I know, my mind was lighter ere this befell.

HIÖRDIS.

The first night[1] is ever the worst;—when that is over, thou wilt heed it no more. Örnulf has sought his revenge by shameful guile; he would not come against us in open strife; he feigned to be peacefully minded; and then he falls upon our defenceless child! Ha, I saw more clearly than ye; well I deemed that Örnulf was evil-minded and false; good cause had I to egg thee on against him and all his faithless tribe.

GUNNAR.

[*Fiercely.*] That hadst thou! My vengeance is poor beside Örnulf's crime. He has lost Thorolf, but he has six sons left—and I have none—none!

A HOUSE-CARL.

[*Enters hastily from the back.*] Örnulf of the Fiords is at hand!

GUNNAR.

Örnulf!

HIÖRDIS AND SEVERAL MEN.

To arms! to arms!

[1] Literally the "blood-night."

DAGNY.

(Simultaneously.) Her father!

SIGURD.

As I [illegible] a [illegible]. Thorolf— [illegible] [illegible] Gunnar!

GUNNAR.

Seize his sword! To it, all my men! Vengeance for Egil's death!

(Örnulf enters with Egil in his arms.)

GUNNAR.

What do I see! Egil!

ÖRNULF.

I bring you back little Egil.

ALL.

(One to another.) Egil! Egil alive!

GUNNAR.

(Letting his sword fall.) Woe is me: what have I done?

DAGNY.

Oh, Thorolf, my brother!

SIGURD.

I knew it! I knew it!

ÖRNULF.

[*Setting* EGIL *down.*] There, Gunnar, hast thou thy pretty boy again.

EGIL.

Father! Old Örnulf would not dó me ill, as thou saidst when I went away.

ÖRNULF.

[*To* HIÖRDIS.] Now have I atoned for thy father; now surely there may be peace between us.

HIÖRDIS.

[*With repressed emotion.*] Mayhap!

GUNNAR.

[*As if waking up.*] Is it a hideous dream that maddens me! Thou—thou bringest Egil home!

ÖRNULF.

As thou seest; but in truth he has been near his death.

GUNNAR.

That I know.

ÖRNULF.

And hast no more joy in his return?

GUNNAR.

Had he come sooner, I had been more glad. But tell me all that has befallen!

ÖRNULF.

That is soon done. Kåre the Peasant was plotting evil against you; with other caitiffs he fared southward after Egil.

GUNNAR.

Kåre! [*To himself.*] Ha, now I understand Thorolf's words!

ÖRNULF.

His purpose came to my ears; I needs must thwart so black a deed. I would not give atonement for Jökul, and, had things so befallen, I had willingly slain thee, Gunnar, in single combat—yet I could not but save thy child. With my sons, I hasted after Kåre.

SIGURD.

[*Softly.*] An accursed deed has here been done.

ÖRNULF.

When I came up with him, Egil's guards lay bound; thy son was already in thy foemen's hands, and they would not long have spared him. Hot was the fight! Seldom have I given and taken keener strokes; Kåre and two men fled inland; the rest sleep safely, and will be hard to waken.

GUNNAR.

[*In eager suspense.*] But thou—thou, Örnulf——?

ÖRNULF.

[*Darkly.*] Six sons followed me into the fight.

GUNNAR.

[*Breathlessly.*] But homewards——?

ÖRNULF.

None.

GUNNAR.

[*Appalled.*] None! [*Softly.*] And Thorolf, Thorolf!

[*Deep emotion among the bystanders.* HIÖRDIS *shows signs of a violent mental struggle;* DAGNY *weeps silently by the high-seat on the right.* SIGURD *stands beside her, painfully agitated.*

ÖRNULF.

[*After a short pause.*] It is hard for a many-branching pine to be stripped in a single storm. But men die and men live;—hand me a horn; I will drink to my sons' memory. [*One of* SIGURD'S *men gives him a horn.*] Hail to you where now ye ride, my bold sons! Close upon your heels shall the bronze-gates not clang, for ye come to the hall with a great following. [*Drinks, and hands back the horn.*] And now home to Iceland! Örnulf has fought his last fight; the old tree has but one green branch left, and it must be shielded warily. Where is Thorolf?

EGIL.

[*To his father.*] Ay, let me see Thorolf! Örnulf says he will carve me a ship with many, many warriors aboard.

ÖRNULF.

I praise all good wights that Thorolf came not with us; for if he too—nay, strong though I be, t h a t had been

too heavy for me to bear. But why comes he not? He was ever the first to meet his father; for to both of us it seemed we could not live apart a single day.

GUNNAR.

Örnulf, Örnulf!

ÖRNULF.

[*With growing uneasiness.*] Ye stand all silent, I mark it now. What ails you? Where is Thorolf?

DAGNY.

Sigurd, Sigurd—this will be the sorest blow to him!

GUNNAR.

[*Struggling with himself.*] Old man!—No——and yet, it cannot be hid——

ÖRNULF.

[*Vehemently.*] My son! Where is he?

GUNNAR.

Thorolf is slain!

ÖRNULF.

Slain! Thorolf? Thorolf? Ha, thou liest!

GUNNAR.

I would give my warmest heart-blood to know him alive!

HIÖRDIS.

[*To* ÖRNULF.] Thorolf was himself to blame for what befell; with dark sayings he gave us to wit that thou hadst fallen upon Egil and slain him;—we had parted half

in wrath, and thou hast ere now brought death among my kindred. And moreover—Thorolf bore himself at the feast like a wanton boy; he brooked not our jesting, and spoke many evil things. Not till then did Gunnar wax wroth; not till then did he raise his hand upon thy son; and well I wot that he had good and lawful ground for that deed.

ÖRNULF.

[*Calmly.*] Well may we see that thou art a woman, for thou usest many words. To what end? If Thorold is slain, then is his saga over.

EGIL.

If Thorold is slain, I shall have no warriors.

ÖRNULF.

Nay, Egil—we have lost our warriors now, both thou and I. [*To* HIÖRDIS.] Thy father sang:

Jökul's kin for Jökul's slayer
many a woe shall still be weaving.

Well hast thou wrought that his words should come true. [*Pauses a moment, then turns to one of the men.*] Where got he his death-wound?

THE MAN.

Right across his brow.

ÖRNULF.

[*Pleased.*] Ha; that is an honourable wound; he did not turn his back. But fell he sideways, or in toward Gunnar's feet?

THE MAN.

Half sideways and half toward Gunnar.

ÖRNULF.

That bodes but half vengeance; well well,—we shall see!

GUNNAR.

[*Approaching.*] Örnulf, I know well that all my goods were naught against thy loss; but crave of me what thou wilt——

ÖRNULF.

[*Sternly interrupting him.*] Give me Thorolf's body, and let me go! Where lies he?

[GUNNAR *points silently to the back.*

ÖRNULF.

[*Takes a step or two, but turns and says in a voice of thunder to* SIGURD, DAGNY, *and others who are making as though to follow him, sorrowing.*] Stay! Think ye Örnulf will be followed by a train of mourners, like a whimpering woman? Stay, I say!—I can bear my Thorolf alone. [*With calm strength.*] Sonless I go; but none shall say that he saw me bowed.

[*He goes slowly out.*

HIÖRDIS.

[*With forced laughter.*] Ay, let him go as he will; we shall scarce need many men to face him should he come with strife again! Now, Dagny—I wot it is the last time thy father shall sail from Iceland on such a quest!

SIGURD.

[*Indignant.*] Oh, shame!

DAGNY.

[*Likewise.*] And thou canst mock him—mock him, after all that has befallen?

HIÖRDIS.

A deed once done, 'tis wise to praise it. This morning I swore hate and vengeance against Örnulf;—the slaying of Jökul I might have forgotten—all, save that he cast shame upon my lot. He called me a leman; if it be so, it shames me not; for Gunnar is mightier now than thy father; he is greater and more famous than Sigurd, thine own husband!

DAGNY.

[*In wild indignation.*] There thou errest, Hiördis—and even now shall all men know that thou dwellest under a coward's roof!

SIGURD.

[*Vehemently.*] Dagny, beware!

GUNNAR.

A coward!

HIÖRDIS.

[*With scornful laughter.*] Thou pratest senselessly.

DAGNY.

It shall no longer be hidden; I held my peace till thou didst mock at my father and my dead brothers; I held my peace while Örnulf was here, lest he should learn that

Thorolf fell by a dastard's hand. But now—praise Gunnar nevermore for that deed in Iceland; for Gunnar is a coward! The sword that lay drawn between thee and the bear-slayer hangs at my husband's side—the ring thou didst take from thy arm thou gavest to Sigurd. [*Takes it off and holds it aloft.*] Behold it!

HIÖRDIS.

[*Wildly.*] Sigurd.

THE CROWD.

Sigurd! Sigurd did the deed!

HIÖRDIS.

[*Quivering with agitation.*] He! he!—Gunnar, is this true?

GUNNAR.

[*With lofty calm.*] It is all true, save only that I am a coward; no coward or dastard am I.

SIGURD.

[*Moved.*] That art thou not, Gunnar! That hast thou never been! [*To the rest.*] Away, my men! Away from here!

DAGNY.

[*At the door, to* HIÖRDIS.] Who is now the mightiest man at the board—my husband, or thine?

[*She goes out with* SIGURD *and his men.*

HIÖRDIS.

[*To herself.*] Now have I but one thing left to do—but one deed to think upon: Sigurd or I must die!

ACT THIRD.

The hall in GUNNAR'S *house. It is day.*
HIÖRDIS *sits on the bench in front of the smaller high-seat, busy twisting a bow-string; on the table lie a bow and some arrows.*

HIÖRDIS.

[*Pulling at the bow-string.*] It is tough and strong; [*With a glance at the arrows*] the shaft is both keen and well-weighted—[*Lets her hands fall in her lap*] but where is the hand that——. [*Vehemently.*] Flouted, flouted by him — by Sigurd! I must hate him more than others, that can I well mark; but many days shall not pass ere I have—— [*Meditating.*] Ay, but the arm, the arm that shall do the deed——?

GUNNAR *enters, silent and thoughtful, from the back.*

HIÖRDIS.

[*After a short pause.*] How goes it with thee, my husband?

GUNNAR.

Ill, Hiördis; I cannot away with that deed of yesterday; it lies heavy on my heart.

HIÖRDIS.

Do as I do; get thee some work to busy thee.

GUNNAR.

Doubtless I must.

[*A pause;* GUNNAR *paces up and down the hall, notices what* HIÖRDIS *is doing, and approaches her.*

GUNNAR.

What dost thou there?

HIÖRDIS.

[*Without looking up.*] I am twisting a bow-string; canst thou not see?

GUNNAR.

A bow-string—of thine own hair?

HIÖRDIS.

[*Smiling.*] Great deeds are born with every hour in these times; yesterday thou didst slay my foster-brother, and I have woven this since daybreak.

GUNNAR.

Hiördis, Hiördis!

HIÖRDIS.

[*Looking up.*] What is amiss?

GUNNAR.

Where wast thou last night?

HIÖRDIS.

Last night?

GUNNAR.

Thou wast not in the sleeping-room.

HIÖRDIS.

Know'st thou that?

GUNNAR.

I could not sleep; I tossed in restless dreams of that—that which befell Thorolf. I dreamt that he came—— No matter; I wakened. Then methought there sounded a strange, fair song through all the house; I arose; I pushed the door ajar; here I saw thee sitting by the log-fire—it burned blue and red—fixing arrow-heads, and singing sorceries over them.

HIÖRDIS.

I did what was needful; for strong is the breast that must be pierced this day.

GUNNAR.

I understand thee well: thou wouldst have Sigurd slain.

HIÖRDIS.

Mayhap.

GUNNAR.

Thou shalt never have thy will. I will keep peace with Sigurd, howe'er thou goad me.

HIÖRDIS.

[*Smiling.*] Dost think so?

GUNNAR.

I know it!

HIÖRDIS.

[*Hands him the bow-string.*] Tell me, Gunnar—canst loose this knot?

GUNNAR.

[*Tries it.*] Nay, it is too cunningly and firmly woven.

HIÖRDIS.

[*Rising.*] The Norns[1] weave yet more cunningly; their web is still harder to unravel.

GUNNAR.

Dark are the ways of the Mighty Ones;—what know we of them, thou or I?

HIÖRDIS.

Yet one thing I know surely: that to both of us must Sigurd's life be baleful.

[*A pause;* GUNNAR *stands lost in thought.*

HIÖRDIS.

[*Who has been silently watching him.*] Of what thinkest thou?

GUNNAR.

Of a dream I had of late. Methought I had done the deed thou cravest; Sigurd lay slain on the earth; thou didst stand beside him, and thy face was wondrous pale. Then said I: "Art thou glad, now that I have done thy will?" But thou didst laugh and answer: "Blither should I be didst thou, Gunnar, lie there in Sigurd's stead."

[1] The "Nornir" were the Fates of northern mythology.

HIÖRDIS.

[*With forced laughter.*] Ill must thou know me if such a senseless dream can stay thy hand.

GUNNAR.

Tell me, Hiördis, what thinkest thou of this hall?

HIÖRDIS.

To speak truly, Gunnar, sometimes it seems to me too strait and narrow.

GUNNAR.

Ay, ay, so I have thought; we are one too many.

HIÖRDIS.

Two, mayhap.

GUNNAR.

[*Who has not heard her last words.*] But that shall be set right.

HIÖRDIS.

[*Looks at him interrogatively.*] Set right? Then thou art minded to——?

GUNNAR.

To fit out my warships and put to sea; I will win back the honour I have lost because thou wast dearer to me than all beside.

HIÖRDIS.

[*Thoughtfully.*] Thou wilt put to sea? Ay, so it may be best for us both.

GUNNAR.

Even from the day we sailed from Iceland, I saw that it would go ill with us. Thy soul is strong and proud; there are times when I well-nigh fear thee; yet, it is strange —chiefly for that do I hold thee so dear. Dread goes forth from thee like a spell; methinks thou couldst lure me to the blackest deeds, and all would seem good to me that thou didst crave. [*Shaking his head reflectively.*] Unfathomable is the Norn's rede; Sigurd should have been thy husband.

HIÖRDIS.

[*Vehemently.*] Sigurd!

GUNNAR.

Yes, Sigurd. Vengeance and hatred blind thee, else wouldst thou prize him better. Had I been like Sigurd, I could have made life glad for thee.

HIÖRDIS.

[*With strong but suppressed emotion.*] That—that deemest thou Sigurd could have done?

GUNNAR.

He is strong of soul, and proud as thou to boot.

HIÖRDIS.

[*Violently.*] If that be so—[*Collecting herself.*] No matter, no matter! [*With a wild outburst.*] Gunnar, take Sigurd's life!

GUNNAR.

Never!

HIÖRDIS.

By fraud and falsehood thou mad'st me thy wife—that shall be forgotten! Five joyless years have I spent in this house—all shall be forgotten from the day when Sigurd lives no more!

GUNNAR.

No harm shall e'er befall him from my hand. [*Shrinks back involuntarily.*] Hiördis, Hiördis, tempt me not!

HIÖRDIS.

Then must I find another avenger; not long shall Sigurd mock at me and thee! [*Clenching her hands in convulsive rage.*] With her — that simpleton—with her mayhap he is even now sitting alone, dallying, and making sport of us; speaking of the bitter wrong that was done me when in thy stead he bore me away; telling how he laughed over his guile as he stood in the mirk of my bower, and I knew him not!

GUNNAR.

Nay, nay, he does not so!

HIÖRDIS.

[*Firmly.*] Sigurd and Dagny must die! I cannot draw breath till they two are gone! [*Comes close up to him, with sparkling eyes, and speaks passionately, but in a whisper.*] Wouldst thou help me to t h a t, Gunnar, then should I live in love with thee; then should I clasp thee in such warm and wild embraces as thou dream'st not of.

GUNNAR.

[*Wavering.*] Hiördis! Wouldst thou——?

HIÖRDIS.

Set thy hand to the work, Gunnar—and the heavy days shall be past. No longer will I quit the hall when thou comest, no longer speak harsh things and quench thy smile when thou art glad. I will clothe me in furs and costly silken robes. When thou goest to war, I will follow thee; when thou ridest forth in peace, I will ride by thy side. At the feast I will sit by thee and fill thy horn, and drink to thee and sing fair songs to make glad thy heart!

GUNNAR.

[*Almost overcome.*] Is it true? Thou wouldst——

HIÖRDIS.

More than that, trust me, ten times more! Give me but revenge! Revenge on Sigurd and Dagny, and I will—— [*Stops as she sees the door open.*] Dagny—comest thou here!

DAGNY.

[*From the back.*] Haste thee, Gunnar! Call thy men to arms!

GUNNAR.

To arms! Against whom?

DAGNY.

Kåre the Peasant is coming, and many outlaws with him; he means thee no good; Sigurd has once barred his way; but who can tell——

GUNNAR.

[*Moved.*] Sigurd has done this for me!

DAGNY.

Sigurd is ever thy faithful friend.

GUNNAR.

And we, Hiördis—we, who thought to——! It is as I say—there is witchcraft in all thy speech; no deed but seemeth fair to me, when thou dost name it.

DAGNY.

[*Astonished.*] What meanest thou?

GUNNAR.

Nothing, nothing! I thank thee for thy tidings, Dagny; I go to gather my men together. [*Turns towards the door, but stops and comes forward again.*] Tell me—how goes it with Örnulf?

DAGNY.

[*Bowing her head.*] Ask not of him. Yesterday he bore Thorolf's body to the ships; now he is raising a grave-mound on the shore;—there shall his sons be laid

[GUNNAR *goes out by the back in silence.*

DAGNY.

Until evening there is no danger. [*Coming nearer.*] Hiördis, I have another errand in thy house; it is to thee I come.

HIÖRDIS.

To me? After all that befell yesterday?

DAGNY.

Even because of that. Hiördis, foster-sister, do not hate me; forget the words that sorrow and evil spirits placed in my mouth; forgive me all the wrong I did thee; for, trust me, I am now tenfold more hapless than thou!

HIÖRDIS.

Hapless—thou! Sigurd's wife!

DAGNY.

It was my doing, all that befell—the stirring up of strife, and Thorolf's death, and all the scorn that fell upon Gunnar and thee. Mine is all the guilt! Woe upon me!—I have lived so happily; but after this day I shall never know joy again.

HIÖRDIS.

[*As if seized by a sudden thought.*] But before—in these five long years—all that time hast thou been happy?

DAGNY.

Canst thou doubt it?

HIÖRDIS.

Yesterday I doubted it not; but——

DAGNY.

What meanest thou?

HIÖRDIS.

Nay, 'tis nought; let us speak of other matters.

DAGNY.

No truly. Hiördis, tell me——!

HIÖRDIS.

It will profit thee little; but since thou wilt have it so—— [*With a malignant expression.*] Canst thou remember once, over in Iceland—we had followed with Örnulf thy father to the Council, and we sat with our playmates in the Council Hall, as is the manner of women. Then came two strangers into the hall.

DAGNY.

Sigurd and Gunnar.

HIÖRDIS.

They greeted us in courtly fashion, and sat on the bench beside us; and there passed between us much merry talk. There were some who must needs know why these two vikings came thither, and if they were not minded to take them wives there in the island. Then said Sigurd: "'Twill be hard for me to find the woman that shall be to my mind." Örnulf laughed, and said there was no lack of high-born and well-dowered women in Iceland; but Sigurd answered: "The warrior needs a high-souled wife. She whom I choose must not rest content with a humble lot; no honour must seem too high for her to strive for; gladly must she follow me a-viking; war-weed must she wear; she must egg me on to strife, and never blink her eyes where sword-blades lighten; for if she be faint-hearted, scant honour will befall me." Is it not true, so Sigurd spake?

DAGNY.

[*Hesitatingly.*] True, he did—but——

HIÖRDIS.

S u c h was she to be, the woman who could make life fair to him; and then—[*With a scornful smile*] then he chose t h e e !

DAGNY.

[*Starting, as in pain.*] Ha, thou wouldst say that——?

HIÖRDIS.

Doubtless thou hast proved thyself proud and high-souled; hast claimed honour of all, that Sigurd might be honoured in thee—is it not so?

DAGNY.

Nay, Hiördis, but——

HIÖRDIS.

Thou hast egged him on to great deeds, followed him in war-weed, and joyed to be where the strife raged hottest—hast thou not?

DAGNY.

[*Deeply moved.*] No, no!

HIÖRDIS.

Hast thou, then, been faint of heart, so that Sigurd has been put to shame?

DAGNY.

[*Overwhelmed.*] Hiördis, Hiördis!

HIÖRDIS.

[*Smiling scornfully.*] Yet thy lot has been a happy one all these years! Think'st thou that Sigurd can say the same?

DAGNY.

Enough, enough. Woe is me! thou hast made me see myself too clearly.

HIÖRDIS.

A jesting word, and straightway thou art in tears! Think no more of it. Look what I have done to-day. [*Takes some arrows from the table.*] Are they not keen and biting—feel! I know well how to sharpen arrows, do I not?

DAGNY.

And to use them too; thou strikest surely, Hiördis! All this thou hast said to me—I had never thought of it before. [*More vehemently.*] But that Sigurd——! That for all these years I should have made his life heavy and unhonoured;—no, no, it cannot be true!

HIÖRDIS.

Nay now, comfort thee, Dagny; indeed it is not true. Were Sigurd of the same mind as in former days, it might be true enough; for then was his whole soul bent on being the foremost man in the land;—now he is content with a lowlier lot.

DAGNY.

No, Hiördis; Sigurd is high-souled now as ever; I see it well, I am not the right mate for him. He has hidden it from me; but it shall be so no longer.

HIÖRDIS.

What wilt thou do?

DAGNY.

I will no longer hang like a clog upon his feet; I will be a hindrance to him no longer.

HIÖRDIS.

Then thou wilt——?

DAGNY.

Peace; some one comes!

A House-carl enters from the back

THE CARL.

Sigurd Viking is coming to the hall.

HIÖRDIS.

Sigurd! Then call Gunnar hither.

THE CARL.

Gunnar has ridden forth to gather his neighbours together; for Kåre the Peasant would——

HIÖRDIS.

Good, good, I know it; go! [*The Carl goes. To* DAGNY, *who is also going.*] Whither wilt thou?

DAGNY.

I will not meet Sigurd. Too well I feel that we must part; but to meet him n o w—no, no, I cannot!

[*Goes out to the left.*

HIÖRDIS.

[*Looks after her in silence for a moment.*] And it was she I would have—— [*Completes her thought by a glance at the bow-string.*] That had been a poor revenge;—nay, I have cut deeper now! 'Tis hard to die, but sometimes harder still to live!

SIGURD *enters from the back.*

HIÖRDIS.

Belike it is Gunnar thou seekest; be seated, he will be here even now. [*Is going.*

SIGURD.

Nay, stay; it is thee I seek, rather than him.

HIÖRDIS.

Me?

SIGURD.

And 'tis well I find thee alone.

HIÖRDIS.

If thou comest to mock me, it would sure be no hindrance to thee though the hall were full of men and women.

SIGURD.

Ay, ay, well I know what thoughts thou hast of me.

HIÖRDIS.

[*Bitterly.*] I do thee wrong mayhap! Nay, nay, Sigurd, thou hast been as a poison to all my days. Be-

think thee who it was that wrought that shameful guile; who it was that sat by my side in the bower, feigning love, with the laugh of cunning in his heart; who it was that flung me forth to Gunnar, since for him I was good enough, forsooth—and then sailed away with the woman he held dear!

SIGURD.

Man's will can do this thing and that; but fate rules in the deeds that shape our lives—so has it gone with us twain.

HIÖRDIS.

True enough; evil Norns hold sway over the world; but their might is little if they find not helpers in our own heart. Happy is he who has strength to battle with the Norn—and it is that I have now in hand.

SIGURD.

What mean'st thou?

HIÖRDIS.

I will venture a trial of strength against those—those who are over me. But let us talk no more of this; I have much to do to-day. [*She seats herself at the table.*

SIGURD.

[*After a short pause.*] Thou makest good weapons for Gunnar.

HIÖRDIS.

[*With a quiet smile.*] Not f o r Gunnar, but a g a i n s t thee.

SIGURD.

Most like it is the same thing.

HIÖRDIS.

Ay, most like it is; for if I be a match for the Norn, then sooner or later shalt thou and Gunnar—— [*Breaks off, leans backwards against the table, looks at him with a smile, and says with an altered ring in her voice:*] Wouldst know the thought that sometimes comes to me? Oft have I made it my pastime to limn pleasant pictures in my mind; at such times I sit and close my eyes and think: Now comes Sigurd the Strong to the isle;—he will burn us in our house, me and my husband. All Gunnar's men have fallen; only he and I are left; they set light to the roof from without:—"A bow-shot," cries Gunnar, "one bow-shot may save us";—then the bow-string breaks—"Hiördis, cut a tress of thy hair and make of it a bow-string—our life is at stake." But then I laugh—"Let it burn, let it burn—to me, life is not worth a wisp of hair!"

SIGURD.

There is a strange might in all thy speech.

[*Approaches her.*

HIÖRDIS.

[*Looks coldly at him.*] Wouldst sit beside me?

SIGURD.

Thou deemest my heart is bitter toward thee. 'Tis the last time, Hiördis, that we shall have speech together; there is something that gnaws me like a sore sickness, and in this wise I cannot part from thee; thou must know me better.

HIÖRDIS.

What wouldst thou?

SIGURD.

Tell thee a saga.

HIÖRDIS.

Is it sad?

SIGURD.

Sad, as life itself.

HIÖRDIS.

[*Bitterly.*] What knowest thou of the sadness of life?

SIGURD.

Judge when my saga is over.

HIÖRDIS.

Then tell it me; I will work the while.
[*He sits on a low stool to her right.*

SIGURD.

Once upon a time there were two young vikings, who set forth from Norway to win wealth and honour; they had sworn each other friendship, and held truly together, how far soever they might fare.

HIÖRDIS.

And the two young vikings hight Sigurd and Gunnar?

SIGURD.

Ay, we may call them so. At last they came to Iceland; and there dwelt an old chieftain, who had come

forth from Norway in King Harald's days. He had two fair women in his house; but one, his foster-daughter, was the noblest, for she was wise and strong of soul; and the vikings spoke of her between themselves, and never had they seen a fairer woman, so deemed they both.

HIÖRDIS.

[*In suspense.*] Both? Wilt thou mock me?

SIGURD.

Gunnar thought of her night and day, and that did Sigurd no less; but both held their peace, and no man could say from her bearing whether Gunnar found favour in her eyes; but that Sigurd found none, that was easy to discern.

HIÖRDIS.

[*Breathlessly.*] Go on, go on——!

SIGURD.

Yet ever the more must Sigurd dream of her; but of that wist no man. Now it befell one evening that there was a drinking-feast; and there did that proud woman vow that no man should possess her save he who wrought a mighty deed, which she named. Then high beat Sigurd's heart for joy; for he felt within him the strength to do that deed. But Gunnar took him apart and told him of his love;—Sigurd said nought of his, but went to the——

HIÖRDIS.

[*Vehemently.*] Sigurd, Sigurd! [*Controlling herself.*] And this saga—is it true?

SIGURD.

True it is. One of us had to yield; Gunnar was my friend; I could do nought else. So Gunnar had thee to wife, and I wedded another woman.

HIÖRDIS.

And didst come to love her!

SIGURD.

I learned to prize her; but one woman only has Sigurd loved, and that is she who frowned upon him from the first day they met. [*Rises.*] Here ends my saga; and now let us part.—Farewell, Gunnar's wife; never shall we meet again.

HIÖRDIS.

[*Springing up.*] Stay, stay! Woe to us both; Sigurd, what hast thou done?

SIGURD.

[*Starting.*] I, done? What ails thee?

HIÖRDIS.

And all this dost thou tell me now! But no—it cannot be true!

SIGURD.

These are my last words to thee, and every word is true. I would not thou shouldst think hardly of me, therefore I needs must speak.

HIÖRDIS.

[*Involuntarily clasps her hands together, and gazes at him in voiceless astonishment.*] Loved—loved me—thou! [*Vehemently, coming close up to him.*] I will not believe thee! [*Looks hard at him, and bursts forth in wild grief.*] Yes, it is true, and—hateful for us both!

[*Hides her face in her hands, and turns away from him.*

SIGURD.

[*Appalled.*] Hiördis!

HIÖRDIS.

[*Softly, struggling with tears and laughter.*] Nay, heed me not! I meant but this, that—— [*Lays her hand on his arm.*] Sigurd, thou hast not told thy saga to the end; that proud woman thou didst tell of—she returned thy love!

SIGURD.

[*Starts backwards.*] Thou?

HIÖRDIS.

[*With composure.*] Aye, Sigurd, I have loved thee, at last I understand it. Thou sayest I was ungentle and short of speech towards thee; what wouldst thou have a woman do? Could I offer thee my love? Then had I been little worthy of thee. I deemed thee ever the noblest man of men; and then to know thee another's husband—'twas that caused me the bitter pain, that myself I could not understand!

SIGURD.

[*Much moved.*] A baleful web has the Norn woven around us twain.

HIÖRDIS.

The blame is thine own; bravely and firmly it becomes a man to act. When I set that hard proof for him who should win me, my thought was all of thee;—yet couldst thou——!

SIGURD.

I knew Gunnar's soul-sickness; I alone could heal it;—was there aught for me to choose? And yet, had I known what I now know, I scarce dare answer for myself; for great is the might of love.

HIÖRDIS.

[*With animation.*] But now, Sigurd!—A baleful hap has held us apart all these years; now the knot is loosed; the days to come shall make good the past to us.

SIGURD.

[*Shaking his head.*] It cannot be; thou knowest we must part again.

HIÖRDIS.

Nay, we must not. I love thee, that may I now say unashamed; for my love is no mere dalliance, like a weak woman's; were I a man—by all the Mighty Ones, I could still love thee, even as now I do! Up then, Sigurd! Happiness is worth a daring deed; we are both free if we but will it, and then the game is won.

SIGURD.

Free? What meanest thou?

HIÖRDIS.

What is Dagny to thee? What can she be to thee? No more than I count Gunnar in my secret heart. What matter though two worthless lives be wrecked?

SIGURD.

Hiördis, Hiördis!

HIÖRDIS.

Let Gunnar stay where he is; let Dagny fare with her father to Iceland: I will follow thee in harness of steel, whithersoever thou wendest. [SIGURD *makes a movement.*] Not as thy wife will I follow thee; for I have belonged to another, and the woman lives that has lain by thy side. No, Sigurd, not as thy wife, but like those mighty women, like Hildë's sisters,[1] will I follow thee, and fire thee to strife and to manly deeds, so that thy name shall be heard over every land. In the sword-game will I stand by thy side; I will fare forth among thy warriors in the storm and on the viking-raid; and when thy death-song is sung, it shall tell of Sigurd and Hiördis in one!

SIGURD.

Once was that my fairest dream; now, it is too late. Gunnar and Dagny stand between us, and that by right. I crushed my new-born love for Gunnar's sake;—how great soever my suffering, I cannot undo my deed. And Dagny—full of faith and trust she left her home and kindred; never must she dream that I longed for Hiördis as often as she took me to her breast.

[1] The Valkyries.

HIÖRDIS.

And for such a cause wilt thou lay a burden on all thy life! To what end hast thou strength and might, and therewith all noble gifts of the mind? And deemest thou it can now beseem me to dwell beneath Gunnar's roof? Nay, Sigurd, trust me, there are many tasks awaiting such a man as thou. Erik is king in Norway—do thou rise against him! Many goodly warriors will join thee and swear thee fealty; with unconquerable might will we press onward, and fight and toil unresting, until thou art seated on the throne of Hårfager!

SIGURD.

Hiördis, Hiördis, so have I dreamt in my wild youth; let it be forgotten—tempt me not!

HIÖRDIS.

[*With dignity.*] It is the Norn's will that we two shall hold together; it cannot be altered. Plainly now I see my task in life: to make thee famous over all the world. Thou hast stood before me every day, every hour of my life; I sought to tear thee out of my mind, but I lacked the might; now it is needless, now that I know thou lovest me.

SIGURD.

[*With forced coldness.*] If that be so—then know—I h a v e loved thee; it has passed now;—I have forgot those days.

HIÖRDIS.

Sigurd, in that thou liest! So much at least am I worth, that if thou hast loved me once, thou canst never forget it.

SIGURD.

[*Vehemently.*] I must; and now I will.

HIÖRDIS.

So be it; but thou c a n s t not. Thou wilt seek to hinder me, but in vain; ere evening falls, Gunnar and Dagny shall know all.

SIGURD.

Ha, that wilt thou never do!

HIÖRDIS.

That will I do!

SIGURD.

Then must I know thee ill; high-souled have I ever deemed thee.

HIÖRDIS.

Evil days breed evil thoughts; too great has been thy trust in me. I will, I must, go forth by thy side—forth to face life and strife; Gunnar's roof-tree is too low for me.

SIGURD.

[*With emphasis.*] But honour between man and man hast thou highly prized. There lack not grounds for strife between me and Gunnar; say, now, that he fell by my hand—wouldst thou still make all known and follow me?

HIÖRDIS.

[*Starting.*] Wherefore askest thou?

SIGURD.

Answer me first: what wouldst thou do, were I to give thy husband his bane.

HIÖRDIS.

[*Looks hard at him.*] Then must I keep silence and never rest until I had seen thee dead.

SIGURD.

[*With a smile.*] It is well, Hiördis—I knew it.

HIÖRDIS.

[*Hastily.*] But it can never come to pass!

SIGURD.

It must come to pass; thou thyself hast cast the die even now for Gunnar's life and mine.

[GUNNAR, *with some House-carls, enters from the back.*

GUNNAR.

[*Gloomily, to* HIÖRDIS.] See now; the seed thou hast sown is sprouting!

SIGURD.

[*Approaching.*] What is amiss with thee?

GUNNAR.

Sigurd, is it thou? What is amiss? Nought but what I might well have foreseen. As soon as Dagny, thy wife, had brought tidings of Kåre the Peasant, I took horse and rode to my neighbours to seek help against him.

HIÖRDIS.

[*Eagerly.*] Well?

GUNNAR.

I was answered awry where'er I came: my dealings with Kåre had been little to my honour, it was said;—aye, and other things were said to boot, that I will not utter—I am a dishonoured man; I am thought to have done a dastard deed; men hold it shame to make common cause with me.

SIGURD.

It shall not long be held shame; ere evening comes, thou shalt have men enough to face Kåre.

GUNNAR.

Sigurd!

HIÖRDIS.

[*In a low voice, triumphantly.*] Ha, I knew it well!

SIGURD.

[*With forced resolution.*] But thereafter is the peace between us at an end; for hearken to my words, Gunnar Headman—thou hast slain Thorolf, my wife's kinsman, and therefore do I challenge thee to single combat[1] to-morrow at break of day.

[HIÖRDIS, *in violent inward emotion, makes a stride towards* SIGURD, *but collects herself and remains standing motionless during the following.*

GUNNAR.

[*In extreme astonishment.*] To single combat——! Me!—Thou art jesting, Sigurd!

[1] *Holmgang*—see note, p. 36.

SIGURD.

Thou art lawfully challenged to single combat; 'twill be a game for life or death; one of us must fall!

GUNNAR.

[*Bitterly.*] Ha, I understand it well. When I came, thou didst talk with Hiördis alone; she has goaded thee afresh!

SIGURD.

Mayhap. [*Half towards* HIÖRDIS.] A high-souled woman must ever guard her husband's honour. [*To the men in the background.*] And do ye, House-carls, now go to Gunnar's neighbours, and say to them that to-morrow he is to ply sword-strokes with me; none dare call that man a dastard who bears arms against Sigurd Viking!

[*The House-carls go out by the back.*

GUNNAR.

[*Goes quickly up to* SIGURD *and presses his hands, in strong emotion.*] Sigurd, my brave brother, now I understand thee! Thou venturest thy life for my honour, as of old for my happiness!

SIGURD.

Thank my wife for that; she has the main part in what I do. To-morrow at break of day——

GUNNAR.

I will meet thee. [*Tenderly.*] Foster-brother, wilt thou have a good blade of me? 'Tis a gift of price.

SIGURD.

I thank thee; but let it hang.—Who knows if next evening I may have any use for it.

GUNNAR.

[*Shakes his hand.*] Farewell, Sigurd!

SIGURD.

Again farewell, and fortune befriend thee this night!

[*They part.* GUNNAR *goes out to the right.* SIGURD *casts a glance at* HIÖRDIS, *and goes out by the back.*

HIÖRDIS.

[*After a pause, softly and thoughtfully.*] To-morrow they fight! Which will fall? [*After a moment's silence, she bursts forth as if seized by a strong resolution.*] Let fall who will—Sigurd and I shall still be together.

ACT FOURTH

By the coast. It is evening; the moon breaks forth now and again, from among dark and ragged storm-clouds. At the back, a black grave-mound, newly heaped up. ÖRNULF *sits on a stone, in front on the right, his head bare, his elbows resting on his knees, and his face buried in his hands. His men are digging at the mound; some give light with pine-knot torches. After a short pause,* SIGURD *and* DAGNY *enter from the boat-house, where a wood fire is burning.*

DAGNY.

[*In a low voice.*] There sits he still. [*Holding* SIGURD *back.*] Nay, speak not to him.

SIGURD.

Thou say'st well; it is too soon; best leave him to himself.

DAGNY.

[*Goes over to the right, and gazes at her father in quiet sorrow.*] So strong was he yesterday when he bore Thorolf's body on his back; strong was he as he helped to heap the grave-mound; but when they were all laid to rest, and earth and stones piled over them—then the sorrow seized him; then seemed it of a sudden as though his fire were quenched. [*Dries her tears.*] Tell me, Sigurd, when thinkest thou to fare homeward to Iceland?

SIGURD.

So soon as the storm abates, and my dealings with Gunnar are ended.

DAGNY.

And then wilt thou buy land and build thee a homestead, and go a-viking no more?

SIGURD.

Yes, yes,—that have I promised thee.

DAGNY.

And I may believe without doubt that Hiördis spoke falsely when she said that I was unworthy to be thy wife?

SIGURD.

Yes, yes, Dagny, trust thou to my word.

DAGNY.

Then am I glad again, and will try to forget all the evil that here has been wrought. In the long winter evenings we will talk together of Gunnar and Hiördis, and——

SIGURD.

Nay, Dagny, wouldst thou have things go well with us, never do thou speak Hiördis' name when once we are at home in Iceland.

DAGNY.

[*Mildly upbraiding him.*] Unjust is thy hatred towards her. Sigurd, Sigurd, it is little like thee.

ONE OF THE MEN.

[*Approaching.*] There now, the mound is finished.

ÖRNULF.

[*As if awaking.*] The mound? Is it—ay, ay——

SIGURD.

Now speak to him, Dagny.

DAGNY.

[*Approaching.*] Father, it is cold out here; the storm is rising with the night.

ÖRNULF.

Nay, never heed it; the mound is close-heaped and crannyless; they lie warm in there.

DAGNY.

Ay, but thou——

ÖRNULF.

I? I am not cold.

DAGNY.

Nought hast thou eaten to-day; wilt thou not go in? The supper-board stands ready.

ÖRNULF.

Let the supper-board stand; I have no hunger.

DAGNY.

But to sit here so still—trust me, thou wilt take hurt of it; thou art ever wont to be stirring.

ÖRNULF.

May be so; there is somewhat that crushes my breast; I cannot draw breath.

[*He again hides his face in his hands. A pause.* DAGNY *seats herself beside him.*

DAGNY.

To-morrow wilt thou make ready thy ship and set forth for Iceland?

ÖRNULF.

[*Without looking up.*] What should I do there? Nay, I will to my sons.

DAGNY.

[*With pain.*] Father!

ÖRNULF.

[*Raises his head.*] Go in and let me sit here; when the storm has played with me for a night or two, the game will be over, I ween.

SIGURD.

Thou canst not think to deal thus with thyself.

ÖRNULF.

Dost marvel that I fain would rest? My day's work is done; I have laid my sons in their grave-mound. [*Vehemently.*] Go from me!—Go, go!

[*He hides his face.*

SIGURD.

[*Softly, to* DAGNY, *who rises.*] Let him sit yet awhile.

DAGNY.

Nay, I have one rede yet untried;—I know him. [*To* ÖRNULF.] Thy day's work done, say'st thou? Nay, that it is not. Thou hast laid thy sons in the grave;—but art thou not a skald? It is meet that thou should'st sing their memory.

ÖRNULF.

[*Shaking his head.*] Sing? Nay, nay; yesterday I could sing; I am too old to-day.

DAGNY.

But needs must thou; honourable men were thy sons, one and all; a song must be made of them, and that can none of our kin but thou.

ÖRNULF.

[*Looks inquiringly at* SIGURD.] To sing? What thinkest t h o u, Sigurd?

SIGURD.

Meseems it is but meet; thou must e'en do as she says.

DAGNY.

Thy neighbours in Iceland will deem it ill done when the grave-ale is drunk over Örnulf's children, and there is no song to sing with it. Thou hast ever time enough to follow thy sons.

ÖRNULF.

Well well, I will try it; and thou, Dagny, give heed, that afterwards thou mayst carve the song on staves.

The men approach with the torches, forming a group around him; he is silent for a time, reflecting; then he says:

Bragi's[1] gift is bitter
when the heart is broken;
sorrow-laden singer,
singing, suffers sorely.

Natheless, since the Skald-god
gave me skill in song-craft,
in a lay loud-ringing
be my loss lamented! [*Rises.*

Ruthless Norn[2] and wrathful
wrecked my life and ravaged,
wiled away my welfare,
wasted Örnulf's treasure.

Sons had Örnulf seven,
by the great gods granted;—
lonely now and life-sick
goes the greybeard, sonless.

Seven sons so stately,
bred among the sword-blades,
made a mighty bulwark
round the snow-locked sea-king.

Levelled lies the bulwark,
dead my sons strong-hearted;
gone the greybeard's gladness,
desolate his dwelling.

[1] Bragi, the god of poetry and eloquence.
[2] See note, p. 92.

Thorolf,—thou my last-born!
'Mongst the bold the boldest!
Soon were spent my sorrow
so but thou wert left me!

Fair thou wast as springtide,
fond towards thy father,
waxing straight and stalwart
to so wight a warrior.

Dark and drear his death-wound
leaves my life's lone evening;
grief hath gripped my bosom
as 'twixt hurtling targes.

Nought the Norn denied me
of her rueful riches,
showering woes unstinted
over Örnulf's world-way.

Weak are now my weapons.
But, were god-might given me,
o n e thing would I strive for—
on the Norn to venge me!

O n e thing would I toil for—
down to death to hurl thee,
Norn, that now hast left me
nought but yonder grave-mound.

Nought, I said? Nay, truly,
somewhat still is Örnulf's,
since of Suttung's[1] mead-horn
he betimes drank deeply.

[*With rising enthusiasm.*

[1] Suttung was a giant who kept guard over the magic mead of poetical inspiration.

Though she stripped me sonless,
one great gift she gave me—
songcraft's mighty secret,
skill to sing my sorrows.

On my lips she laid it,
goodly gift of songcraft;
loud, then, let my lay sound,
e'en where they are lying!

Hail, my stout sons seven!
Hail, as homeward ride ye!
Songcraft's glorious god-gift
stauncheth woe and wailing.

[*He draws a deep breath, throws back the hair from his brow, and says calmly:*

So—so; now is Örnulf sound and strong again. [*To the men.*] Follow me to the supper-board, lads; heavy has been our day's work!

[*Goes with the men into the boat-house.*

DAGNY.

Praised be the Mighty Ones on high that gave me so good a rede. [*To* SIGURD.] Wilt thou not go in?

SIGURD.

Nay, I list not to. Tell me, are all things ready for to-morrow?

DAGNY.

They are ready; a silk-sewn shroud lies on the bench; but I know full surely that thou wilt hold thee against Gunnar, so I have not wept over it.

SIGURD.

Grant all good powers, that thou mayest never weep for my sake. [*He stops and looks out.*

DAGNY.

What art thou listening to?

SIGURD.

Hear'st thou nought—y o n d e r?
[*Points towards the left.*

DAGNY.

Ay, there goes a fearsome storm over the sea!

SIGURD.

[*Going up a little towards the background.*] There will fall hard hailstones in that storm. [*Shouts.*] Who comes?

KÅRE THE PEASANT.

[*Without on the left.*] Folk thou wotst of, Sigurd Viking!

KÅRE THE PEASANT, *with a band of armed men, enters from the left.*

SIGURD.

Whither would ye?

KÅRE.

To Gunnar's hall.

SIGURD.

As foemen?

KÅRE.

Ay, trust me for that! Thou didst hinder me before; but now I ween thou wilt scarce do the like.

SIGURD.

Maybe not.

KÅRE.

I have heard of thy challenge to Gunnar; but if things go to my mind, weak will be his weapons when the time comes for your meeting.

SIGURD.

'Tis venturesome work thou goest about; take heed for thyself, Peasant!

KÅRE.

[*With defiant laughter.*] Leave that to me; wouldst thou tackle thy ship to-night, we will see that thou hast light enow!—Come, all my men; here goes the way.

[*They go off to the right, at the back.*

DAGNY.

Sigurd, Sigurd, this misdeed must thou hinder.

SIGURD.

[*Goes quickly to the door of the hut, and calls in.*] Up from the board, Örnulf; take vengeance on Kåre the Peasant!

ÖRNULF.

[*Comes out, with the rest.*] Kåre the Peasant—where is he?

SIGURD.

He is making for Gunnar's hall to burn it over their heads.

ÖRNULF.

Ha-ha—let him do as he will; so shall I be avenged on Gunnar and Hiördis, and afterwards I can deal with Kåre.

SIGURD.

Nay, that rede avails not; wouldst thou strike at Kåre, thou must seek him out to-night; for when his misdeed is done, he will take to the mountains. I have challenged Gunnar to meet me, man to man; him thou hast safe enough, unless I myself—but no matter.—To-night he must be shielded from his foes; it would ill befit thee to let so vile a caitiff as Kåre rob thee of thy revenge.

ÖRNULF.

Thou say'st truly. To-night will I shield the slayer of Thorolf; but to-morrow he must die.

SIGURD.

He or I—doubt not of that!

ÖRNULF.

Come then, to take vengeance for Örnulf's sons.

[*He goes out with his men by the back, to the right.*

SIGURD.

Dagny, do thou follow them;—I must bide here; for the rumour of the combat is already abroad, and I may not meet Gunnar ere the time comes. But thou—do

thou keep rein on thy father; he must go honourably to work; in Gunnar's hall there are many women; no harm must befall Hiördis or the rest.

DAGNY.

Yes, I will follow them. Thou takest thought even for Hiördis; I thank thee for it.

SIGURD.

Go, go, Dagny!

DAGNY.

I go; but be thou at ease as to Hiördis; she has gilded armour in her bower, and will know how to shield herself.

SIGURD.

That deem I too; but go thou nevertheless; guide thy father's course; watch over all—and over Gunnar's wife!

DAGNY.

Trust to me. Farewell, till we meet again!

[*She follows the others.*

SIGURD.

'Tis the first time, foster-brother, that I stand weaponless whilst thou art in danger. [*Listens.*] I hear shouts and sword-strokes;—they are already at the hall. [*Goes towards the right, but stops and recoils in astonishment.*] Hiördis! Comes she hither!

HIÖRDIS *enters, clad in a short scarlet kirtle, with gilded armour; helmet, hauberk, arm-plates, and greaves. Her hair is flying loose; at her back hangs a quiver, and at her belt a small shield. She has in her hand the bow strung with her hair.*

HIÖRDIS.

[*Hastily looking behind her, as though in dread of something pursuing her, goes close up to* SIGURD, *seizes him by the arm, and whispers:*] Sigurd, Sigurd, canst thou see it?

SIGURD.

What? Where?

HIÖRDIS.

The wolf t h e r e—close behind me; it does not move; it glares at me with its two red eyes. It is my wraith.[1] Sigurd! Three times has it appeared to me; that bodes that I shall surely die to-night!

SIGURD.

Hiördis, Hiördis!

HIÖRDIS.

It has sunk into the earth! Aye, aye, now it has warned me.

SIGURD.

Thou art sick; come, go in with me.

HIÖRDIS.

Nay, here will I bide; I have but little time left.

SIGURD.

What has befallen thee?

[1] The word "wraith" is here used in an obviously inexact sense; but the wraith seemed to be the nearest equivalent in English mythology to the Scandinavian "fylgie," an attendant spirit, often regarded as a sort of emanation from the person it accompanied, and sometimes (as in this case) typifying that person's moral attributes.

HIÖRDIS.

What has befallen? That know I not; but 'twas true what thou said'st to-day, that Gunnar and Dagny stand between us; we must away from them and from life; then can we be together!

SIGURD.

We? Ha, thou meanest——.

HIÖRDIS.

[*With dignity.*] I have been homeless in this world from that day thou didst take another to wife. That was ill done of thee! All good gifts may a man give to his faithful friend—all, save the woman he loves; for if he do that, he rends the Norn's secret web, and two lives are wrecked. An unerring voice within me tells me I came into the world that my strong soul might cheer and uphold thee through heavy days, and that thou wert born to the end I might find in o n e man all that seemed to me great and noble; for this I know, Sigurd—had we two held together, then hadst thou become more famous than all others, and I happier.

SIGURD.

It avails not now to mourn. Think'st thou 'tis a merry life that awaits me? To be by Dagny's side day by day, and feign a love my heart shrinks from? Yet so it must be; it cannot be altered.

HIÖRDIS.

[*In a growing frenzy.*] It s h a l l be altered! We must out of this life, both of us! Seest thou this bow-

string? With it can I surely hit my mark; for I have crooned fair sorceries over it! [*Places an arrow in the bow, which is strung.*] Hark! hark! that rushing in the air? It is the dead men's ride to Valhal: I have bewitched them hither;—we two will join them in their ride!

SIGURD.

[*Shrinking back.*] Hiördis, Hiördis—I fear thee!

HIÖRDIS.

[*Not heeding him.*] Our fate no power can alter now! Oh, 'tis better so than if thou hadst wedded me here in this life—if I had sat in thy homestead weaving linen and wool for thee and bearing thee children—pah!

SIGURD.

Hold, hold! Thy sorceries have been too strong for thee; they have made thee soul-sick, Hiördis! [*Horror-struck.*] Ha, see—see! Gunnar's hall—it is burning!

HIÖRDIS.

Let it burn, let it burn! The cloud-hall up yonder is loftier than Gunnar's rafter-roof!

SIGURD.

But Egil, thy son—they are slaying him!

HIÖRDIS.

Let him die—my shame dies with him.

SIGURD.

And Gunnar—they are taking thy husband's life!

HIÖRDIS.

What care I! A better husband shall I follow home this night! Ay, Sigurd, so must it be; here on this earth grows no happiness for me. The White God is coming northward; him will I not meet; the old gods are strong no longer;—they sleep, they sit half shadow-like on high; —with them will we strive! Out of this life, Sigurd! I will enthrone thee king in heaven, and I myself will sit by thy side. [*The storms bursts wildly.*] Hark, hark, here comes our company! Canst see the black steeds galloping?—one is for me and one for thee. [*Draws the arrow to her ear and shoots.*] Away, then, on thy last ride home!

SIGURD.

— Well aimed, Hiördis! [*He falls.*

HIÖRDIS.

[*Jubilant, rushes up to him.*] Sigurd, my brother,— now art thou mine at last!

SIGURD.

Now less than ever. Here our ways part; for I am a Christian man.

HIÖRDIS.

[*Appalled.*] Thou——! Ha, no, no!

SIGURD.

The White God is mine; King Æthelstan taught me to know him; it is to h i m I go.

HIÖRDIS.

[*In despair.*] And I——! [*Drops her bow.*] Woe! woe!

SIGURD.

Heavy has my life been from the hour I tore thee out of my own heart and gave thee to Gunnar. I thank thee, Hiördis;—now am I so light and free. [*Dies.*

HIÖRDIS.

[*Quietly.*] Dead! Then truly have I brought my soul to wreck. [*The storm increases; she breaks forth wildly.*] They come! I have bewitched them hither! No, no! I will not go with you! I will not ride without Sigurd! It avails not—they see me; they laugh and beckon to me; they spur their horses! [*Rushes out to the edge of the cliff at the back.*] They are upon me;—and no shelter, no hiding-place! Ay, mayhap at the bottom of the sea! [*She casts herself over.*

[ÖRNULF, DAGNY, GUNNAR, *with* EGIL, *gradually followed by* SIGURD'S *and* ÖRNULF'S *men, enter from the right.*

ÖRNULF.

[*Turning towards the grave-mound.*] Now may ye sleep in peace; for ye lie not unavenged.

DAGNY.

[*Entering.*] Father, father—I die of fear—all that blood and strife—and the storm;—hark, hark!

GUNNAR.

[*Carrying* EGIL.] Peace, and shelter for my child.

ÖRNULF.

Gunnar!

GUNNAR.

Ay, Örnulf, my homestead is burnt and my men are slain; I am in thy power; do with me what thou wilt!

ÖRNULF.

That Sigurd must look to. But in, under roof! It is not safe out here.

DAGNY.

Ay, ay, in! [*Goes towards the boat-house, catches sight of* SIGURD'S *body, and shrieks.*] Sigurd, my husband!—They have slain him! [*Throwing herself upon him.*

ÖRNULF.

[*Rushes up.*] Sigúrd!

GUNNAR.

[*Sets* EGIL *down.*] Sigurd dead!

DAGNY.

[*Looks despairingly at the men, who surround the body.*] No, no, it is not so;—he must be alive! [*Catches sight of the bow.*] Ha, what is that? [*Rises.*

ÖRNULF.

Daughter, it is as first thou saidst—Sigurd is slain.

GUNNAR.

[*As if seized by a sudden thought.*] And Hiördis!—Has Hiördis been here?

DAGNY.

[*Softly and with self-control.*] I know not; but this I know, that her bow has been here.

GUNNAR.

Ay, I thought no less!

DAGNY.

Hush, hush! [*To herself.*] So bitterly did she hate him!

GUNNAR.

[*Aside.*] She has slain him—the night before the combat; then after all she loved me.

[*A thrill of dread runs through the whole group;* ASGÅRDSREIEN—*the ride of the fallen warriors to Valhal—hurtles through the air.*

EGIL.

[*In terror.*] Father! See, see!

GUNNAR.

What is it?

EGIL.

Up there—all the black horses——!

GUNNAR.

It is the clouds that——

ÖRNULF.

Nay, it is the dead men's home-faring.

EGIL.

[*With a shriek.*] Mother is with them!

DAGNY.

All good spirits!

GUNNAR.

Child, what say'st thou?

EGIL.

There—in front—on the black horse! Father, father!

[EGIL *clings in terror to his father; a short pause; the storm passes over, the clouds part, the moon shines peacefully on the scene.*

GUNNAR.

[*In quiet sorrow.*] Now is Hiördis surely dead.

ÖRNULF.

So it must be, Gunnar;—and my vengeance was rather against her than thee. Dear has this meeting been to both of us;—there is my hand; be there peace between us!

GUNNAR.

Thanks, Örnulf! And now aboard; I sail with thee to Iceland.

ÖRNULF.

Ay, to Iceland! Long will it be ere our forth-faring is forgotten.

Weapon-wielding warriors' meeting,
woful, by the norland seaboard,
still shall live in song and saga
while our stem endures in Iceland.

THE END

THE PRETENDERS

THE PRETENDERS

INTRODUCTION *

SIX years elapsed between the composition of *The Vikings* and that of *The Pretenders*.[1] In the interval Ibsen wrote *Love's Comedy*, and brought all the world of Norwegian philistinism, and (as we should now say) suburbanism, about his ears. Whereas hitherto his countrymen had ignored, they now execrated him. In his autobiographic letter of 1870, to Peter Hansen, he wrote: "The only person who at that time approved of the book was my wife. . . . My countrymen excommunicated me. All were against me. The fact that all were against me—that there was no longer any one outside my own family circle of whom I could say 'He believes in me'—must, as you can easily see, have aroused a mood which found its outlet in *The Pretenders*." It is to be noted that this was written during a period of estrangement from Björnson. I do not know what was Björnson's attitude towards *Love's Comedy* in particular; but there can be no doubt that, in general, he believed in and encouraged his brother poet, and employed his own

[1] The original title *Kongsemnerne* might be more literally translated "The Scions of Royalty." It is rendered by Brandes in German "Königsmaterie," or "the stuff from which kings are made."

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growing influence in efforts to his advantage. In representing himself as standing quite alone, Ibsen probably forgets, for the moment, his relation to his great contemporary.

Yet the relation to Björnson lay at the root of the character-contrast on which *The Pretenders* is founded. Ibsen always insisted that each of his plays gave poetic form to some motive gathered from his own experience or observation; and this is very clearly true of the present play. Ever since *Synnöve Solbakken* had appeared in 1857, Björnson, the expansive, eloquent, lyrical Björnson, had been the darling child of fortune. He had gone from success to success unwearied. He was recognised throughout Scandinavia (in Denmark no less than in Norway) as the leader of the rising generation in almost every branch of imaginative literature. He was full, not only of inspiration and energy, but of serene self-confidence. Meanwhile Ibsen, nearly five years older than he, had been pursuing his slow and painful course of development, in comparative obscurity, in humiliating poverty, and amid almost complete lack of appreciation. "Mr. Ibsen is a great cipher" (or "nullity"), wrote a critic in 1858; another, in 1863, laid it down that "Ibsen has a certain technical and artistic talent, but nothing of what can be called 'genius.'" The scoffs of the critics, however, were not the sorest trials that he had to bear. What was hardest to contend against was the doubt as to his own poetic calling and election that constantly beset him. This doubt could not but be generated by the very tardiness of his mental growth. We see him again and again (in the case of *Olaf Liliekrans*, of *The Vikings*, of *Love's*

Comedy, and of *The Pretenders* itself), conceiving a plan and then abandoning it for years—no doubt because he found himself, in one respect or another, unripe for its execution. Every such experience must have involved for him days and weeks of fruitless effort and discouragement. To these moods of scepticism as to his own powers he gave expression in a series of poems (for the most part sonnets) published in 1859 under the title of *In the Picture Gallery*. In it he represents the "black elf" of doubt, whispering to him: "Your soul is like the dry bed of a mountain stream, in which the singing waters of poetry have ceased to flow. If a faint sound comes rustling down the empty channel, do not imagine that it portends the return of the waters—it is only the dry leaves eddying before the autumn wind, and pattering among the barren stones." In those years of struggle and stress, of depressing criticism, and enervating self-criticism, he must often have compared his own lot and his own character with Björnson's, and perhaps, too, wondered whether there were no means by which he could appropriate to himself some of his younger and more facile brother-poet's kingly self-confidence. For this relation between two talents he partly found and partly invented a historic parallel in the relation between two rival pretenders to the Norwegian throne, Håkon Håkonsson and Skule Bårdsson.

Dr. Brandes, who has admirably expounded the personal element in the genesis of this play, compares Håkon-Björnson and Skule-Ibsen with the Aladdin and Nureddin of Oehlenschläger's beautiful dramatic poem. Aladdin is the born genius, serene, light-hearted, a trifle shallow,

who grasps the magic lamp with an unswerving confidence in his right to it. ("It is that which the Romans called *ingenium*," says Bishop Nicholas, "truly I am not strong in Latin; but 'twas called *ingenium*.") Nureddin, on the other hand, is the far profounder, more penetrating, but sceptical and self-torturing spirit. When at last he seizes Aladdin's lamp, as Skule annexes Håkon's king's thought, his knees tremble, and it drops from his grasp, just as the Genie is ready to obey him.

It is needless to cite the passages from the scenes between Skule and Bishop Nicholas in the second act, Skule and Håkon in the third, Skule and Jatgeir in the fourth, in which this element of personal symbolism is present. The reader will easily recognise them, while recognising at the same time that their dramatic appropriateness, their relevance to the historic situation as the poet viewed it, is never for a moment impaired. The underlying meaning is never allowed to distort or denaturalise the surface aspect of the picture.[1] The play may be read, understood, and fully appreciated, by a person for whom this underlying meaning has no existence. One does not point it out as an essential element in the work of art, or even as adding to its merit, but simply as affording a particularly clear instance of Ibsen's method of interweaving "Wahrheit" with "Dichtung."

So early as 1858, soon after the completion of *The Vikings*, Ibsen had been struck by the dramatic material in *Håkon Håkonsson's Saga*, as related by Snorri Sturlas-

[1] This remark does not apply, of course, to the satiric "parabasis" uttered by the Bishop's ghost in the fifth act. That is a totally different matter.

son's nephew, Sturla Thordsson, and had sketched a play on the subject. At that time, however, he put the draft aside. It was only as the years went on, as he found himself "excommunicated" after *Love's Comedy*, and as the contrast between Björnson's fortune and his own became ever more marked, that the figures of Skule and Håkon took more and more hold upon his imagination. In June, 1863, he attended a "Festival of Song" at Bergen, and there met Björnson, who had been living abroad since 1860. Probably under the stimulus of this meeting, he set to work upon *The Pretenders* immediately on his return to Christiania, and wrote it with almost incredible rapidity. The manuscript went to the printers in September; the book was published in October, 1863 (though dated 1864), and the play was produced at the Christiania Theatre, under the author's own supervision, on January 17, 1864. The production was notably successful; yet no one seems fully to have realised what it meant for Norwegian literature. Outside of Norway, at any rate, it awoke no echo. George Brandes declares that scarcely a score of copies of the play found their way to Denmark. Not until Ibsen had left Norway (April, 1864) and had taken the Danish reading public by storm with *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*, did people turn back to *The Pretenders* and discover what an extraordinary achievement it was. In January, 1871, it was produced at the Royal Theatre, Copenhagen, where Emil Poulsen found in Bishop Nicholas one of the great triumphs of his career. It was produced by the Meiningen Company and at the Munich Hoftheater in 1875, in Stockholm in 1879, at the Königliches Schauspielhaus, Berlin, and at the Vienna

Burgtheater in 1891; and it has from time to time been acted at many other Scandinavian and German theatres.[1] The character of Nicholas has fascinated many great actors: what a pity that it did not come in the way of Sir Henry Irving when he was at the height of his power! But of course no English actor-manager would dream of undertaking a character which dies in the middle of the third act.

Ibsen's treatment of history in this play may be proposed as a model to other historic dramatists. Although he has invented a great deal, his inventions supplement rather than contradict the records. Chronology, indeed, he treats with considerable freedom, and at the same time with ingenious vagueness. The general impression one receives in reading the play is that the action covers a space of four or five years; as a matter of fact it covers twenty-two years, between the folkmote in Bergen, 1218, and Skule's death, 1240. All the leading characters are historical; and although much is read into them which history does not warrant, there is little that history absolutely forbids us to conceive. The general features of the struggle between the two factions—Håkon's Birkebeiner, or Birchlegs, and Skule's Vargbælgs—are correctly enough reproduced. In his treatment of this period, the Norwegian historian, J. E. Sars, writing thirteen years after the appearance of *The Pretenders*, uses terms which might almost have been suggested by Ibsen's play. "On the one side," he says, "we find strength and

[1] In America it was acted in April, 1907, by the Yale University Dramatic Association, but has not as yet (1911) found its way to the professional stage.

certainty, on the other lameness and lack of confidence. The old Birchlegs[1] go to work openly and straightforwardly, like men who are immovably convinced of the justice of their cause, and unwaveringly assured of its ultimate victory. Skule's adherents, on the other hand, are ever seeking by intrigues and chicanery to place stumbling-blocks in the way of their opponents' enthusiasm." Håkon represented Sverre's ideal of a democratic kingship, independent of the oligarchy of bishops and barons. "He was," says Sars, "reared in the firm conviction of his right to the Throne; he grew up among the veterans of his grandfather's time, men imbued with Sverre's principles, from whom he accepted them as a ready-made system, the realisation of which could only be a question of time. He stood from the first in a clear and straightforward position to which his whole personality corresponded. . . . He owed his chief strength to the repose and equilibrium of mind which distinguished him, and had its root in his unwavering sense of having right and the people's will upon his side." His great "king's-thought," however, seems to be an invention of the poet's. Skule, on the other hand, represented the old nobility in its struggle against the new monarchy. "He was the centre of a hierarchic aristocratic party; but after its repeated defeats this party must have been lacking alike in number and in confidence. . . . It was clear from the first that his attempt to reawaken the old wars of the succession in Norway was undertaken in the spirit of the desperate gambler, who does not count the chances, but

[1] The followers of Håkon's grandfather, King Sverre. See Note, p. 161.

throws at random, in the blind hope that luck may befriend him. . . . Skule's enterprise had thus no support in opinion or in any prevailing interest, and one defeat was sufficient to crush him."

In the character of Bishop Nicholas, too, Ibsen has widened and deepened his historical material, rather than poetised with a free hand. "Bishop Nicholas," says Sars, "represented rather the aristocracy . . . than the cloth to which he belonged. He had begun his career as a worldly chieftain, and, as such, taken part in Magnus Erlingsson's struggles with Sverre; and although he must have had some tincture of letters, since he could contrive to be elected a bishop . . . there is no lack of indications that his spiritual lore was not of the deepest. During his long participation in the civil broils, both under Sverre and later, we see in him a man to whose character any sort of religious or ecclesiastical enthusiasm must have been foreign, his leading motives being personal ambition and vengefulness rather than any care for general interests—a cold and calculating nature, shrewd but petty and without any impetus, of whom Håkon Håkonsson, in delivering his funeral speech . . . could find nothing better to say than that he had not his equal in worldly wisdom (*veraldar vit*)." I cannot find that the Bishop played any such prominent part in the struggle between the King and the Earl as Ibsen assigns to him; and the only foundation for the great death-bed scene seems to be the following passage from *Håkon Håkonsson's Saga*, Cap. 138: "As Bishop Nicholas at that time lay very sick, he sent a messenger to the King praying him to come to him. The King had on this expedition seized certain letters, from

which he gathered that the Bishop had not been true to him. With this he upbraided him, and the Bishop, confessing it, prayed the King to forgive him. The King replied that he did so willingly, for God's sake; and as he could discern that the Bishop lay near to death, he abode with him until God called him from the world."

In the introduction to *The Vikings at Helgeland*, I have suggested that in that play Ibsen had reached imaginative and technical maturity, but was as yet intellectually immature. The six years that elapsed between *The Vikings* and *The Pretenders* placed him at the height of his intellectual power. We have only to compare Skule, Håkon, and Bishop Nicholas with Gunnar, Sigurd, and Örnulf to feel that we have passed from nobly-designed and more or less animated waxworks to complex and profoundly-studied human beings. There is no Hiördis in *The Pretenders*, and the female character-drawing is still controlled by purely romantic ideals;[1] but how exquisitely human is Margrete in comparison with the almost entirely conventional Dagny! The criticism of life, too, which in *The Vikings* is purely sentimental, here becomes intense and searching. The only point of superiority in *The Vikings*—if it be a point of superiority—is purely techni-

[1] On page 323 will be found a reference to Brandes's *Ibsen and Björnson;* but I may as well give here the substance of the passage. In the original form of the play, three speeches of Ingeborg's, in her scene with Skule, ran as follows: "It is man's right to forget," "It is woman's happiness to remember," and "To have to sacrifice all and be forgotten, that is woman's saga." It was only on Brandes's remonstrance that Ibsen substituted the present form of these speeches, in which they became, not the generalised expression of an ideal, but merely utterances of Ingeborg's individual character.

cal. The action of the earlier play is concentrated and rounded. It has all the "unity," or "unities," that a rational criticism can possibly demand. In a word, it is, in form as well as essence, an ideal tragedy. *The Pretenders*, on the other hand, is a chronicle-play, far more close-knit than Shakespeare's or Schiller's works in that kind, but, nevertheless, what Aristotle would call "episodic" in its construction. The weaving of the plot, however, is quite masterly, betokening an effort of invention and adjustment incomparably greater than that which went to the making of *The Vikings*. It was doubtless his training in the school of French intrigue that enabled Ibsen to depict with such astonishing vigour that master wire-puller, Bishop Nicholas. This form of technical dexterity he was afterwards to outgrow and bring into disrepute. But from *The Vikings* to *Pillars of Society* he practised, whenever he was writing primarily for the stage, the methods of the "well-made play"; and in everything but concentration, which the very nature of the subject excluded, *The Pretenders* is thoroughly "well-made."

With this play, though the Scandinavian criticism of 1864 seems to have been far from suspecting the fact, Ibsen took his place among the great dramatists of the world. In wealth of characterisation, complexity and nobility of emotion, and depth of spiritual insight, it stands high among the masterpieces of romantic drama. It would be hard to name a more vigorous character-projection than that of Bishop Nicholas, or any one dramatic invention more superbly inspired than the old man's death scene, with the triumphant completion of his

perpetuum mobile. But even if the Bishop were entirely omitted, the play would not be *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark. The characters of Håkon and Skule, and the struggle between them, would still make one of the greatest historic dramas in literature.

It has not been generally noticed, I think, that Ibsen found in Björnson's *King Sverre*, published in 1861, a study of Bishop Nicholas in his younger days. The play, as a whole, is a poor one, and does not appear in the collected edition of Björnson's works; but there is distinct merit in the drawing of the Bishop's character. Furthermore, it ought to be remembered that *The Pretenders* was not the first work, or even the first great work, of its class in Norwegian literature. In 1862, Björnson had published his splendid trilogy of *Sigurd Slembe*, which, though more fluid and uneven than *The Pretenders*, contains several passages of almost Shakespearean power. It was certainly greater than anything Ibsen had done up to that date. Ibsen reviewed it on its appearance, in terms of unmixed praise, yet, as one cannot but feel, rather overcautiously.

If anything could excuse the coolness of Norwegian criticism towards *The Pretenders*, it was the great and flagrant artistic blemish of the Ghost Scene in the last act. This outburst of prophetico-topical satire is a sheer excrescence on the play, indefensible, but, at the same time, fortunately negligible. It is, however, of interest as a symptom of Ibsen's mood in the last months before he left Norway, and also as one of the links in that chain which binds all his works together. Just as Skule's attempt to plagiarise Håkon's king's-thought points back-

wards to Gunnar's moral lapse in taking advantage of the fraud on Hiördis, so the ironic rhymes of the Bagler-Bishop's ghost point forward to the lyric indignation and irony of *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*.

THE PRETENDERS
(1863)

CHARACTERS

HÅKON HAKONSSON, *the King elected by the Birchlegs.*
INGA OF VARTEIG, *his mother.*
EARL SKULE.
LADY RAGNHILD, *his wife.*
SIGRID, *his sister.*
MARGRETE, *his daughter.*
GUTHORM INGESSON.
SIGURD RIBBUNG.
NICHOLAS ARNESSON, *Bishop of Oslo.*
DAGFINN THE PEASANT, *Håkon's marshal.*
IVAR BODDE, *his chaplain.*
VEGARD VAERADAL, *one of his guard.*
GREGORIUS JONSSON, *a nobleman.*
PAUL FLIDA, *a nobleman.*
INGEBORG, *Andres Skialdarband's wife.*
PETER, *her son, a young priest.*
SIRA VILIAM, *Bishop Nicholas's chaplain.*
MASTER SIGARD OF BRABANT, *a physician.*
JATGEIR SKALD, *an Icelander.*
BÅRD BRATTE, *a chieftain from the Trondhiem district.*
Populace and Citizens of Bergen, Oslo, and Nidaros.
Priests, Monks, and Nuns.
Guests, Guards, and Ladies.
Men-at-arms, etc. etc.

The action passes in the first half of the Thirteenth Century.

Pronunciation of Names: Håkon=Hoakoon ("oa" as in "board"); Skule=Skoolë; Margrete=Margraytë; Guthorm=Gootorm; Sigurd Ribbung=Sigoord Ribboong; Dagfinn ("a" as in "hard"); Ivar Bodde=Eevar Boddë; Vegard=Vaygard; Jonsson=Yoonson; Flida=Fleeda; Ingeborg=Ingheborg; Jatgeir=Yatgheir; Bård Bratte=Board Brattë. The name "Ingeborg" appears as "Ingebjörg" in Ibsen's text. The form I have substituted is equally current in Norway, and less troublesome to pronounce.

THE PRETENDERS

HISTORIC PLAY IN FIVE ACTS

ACT FIRST

The churchyard of Christ Church, Bergen. At the back rises the church, the main portal of which faces the spectators. In front, on the left, stands HÅKON HÅKONSSON, *with* DAGFINN THE PEASANT, VEGARD OF VÆRADAL, IVAR BODDE, *and several other nobles and chieftains. Opposite to him stand* EARL SKULE, GREGORIUS JONSSON, PAUL FLIDA, *and others of the Earl's men. Further back on the same side are seen* SIGURD RIBBUNG *and his followers, and a little way from him* GUTHORM INGESSON, *with several chiefs. Men-at-arms line the approaches to the church; the common people fill the churchyard; many are perched in the trees and seated on the walls; all seem to await, in suspense, the occurrence of some event. All the church bells of the town are ringing far and near.*

EARL SKULE.

[*Softly and impatiently, to* GREGORIUS JONSSON.] Why tarry they so long in there?

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

Hush! The psalm is beginning.

[*From inside the closed church doors, to the accompaniment of trumpets, is heard a* CHOIR OF MONKS AND NUNS *singing* Domine cœli, *etc. etc. While the singing is going on, the church door is opened from inside; in the porch* BISHOP NICHOLAS *is seen, surrounded by Priests and Monks.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Steps forward to the doorway and proclaims with uplifted crozier.*] Inga of Varteig is even now bearing the iron on behalf of Håkon the Pretender.

[*The church door is closed again; the singing inside continues.*

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

[*In a low voice to the* EARL.] Call upon Holy King Olaf to protect the right.

EARL SKULE.

[*Hurriedly, with a deprecating gesture.*] Not now. Best not remind him of me.

IVAR BODDE.

[*Seizing* HÅKON *by the arm.*] Pray to the Lord thy God, Håkon Håkonsson.

HÅKON.

No need; I am sure of him.

[*The singing in the church grows louder; all uncover; many fall upon their knees and pray.*

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

[*To the* EARL.] A solemn hour for you and for many!

EARL SKULE.

[*Looking anxiously towards the church.*] A solemn hour for Norway.

PAUL FLIDA.

[*Near the* EARL.] Now is the glowing iron in her hands.

DAGFINN.

[*Beside* HÅKON.] They are coming down the nave.

IVAR BODDE.

Christ protect thy tender hands, Inga, mother of the King!

HÅKON.

Surely all my life shall reward her for this hour.

EARL SKULE.

[*Who has been listening intently, breaks out suddenly.*] Did she cry out? Has she let the iron fall?

PAUL FLIDA.

[*Goes up.*] I know not what it was.

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

Hark to the women weeping in the outer hall!

THE CHOIR IN THE CHURCH.

[*Breaks forth in jubilation.*] Gloria in excelsis Deo!

[*The doors are thrown open.* INGA *comes forth, followed by Nuns, Priests, and Monks.*

INGA.

[*On the church steps.*] God has given judgment! Behold these hands; with them I bore the iron!

VOICES AMONGST THE MULTITUDE.

They are tender and white as before!

OTHER VOICES.

Fairer still!

THE WHOLE MULTITUDE.

He is Håkon's son! He is Sverre's[1] grandson:

HÅKON.

[*Embraces her.*] Thanks to thee, thanks to thee, blessed among women!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*In passing, to the* EARL.] 'Twas ill done to press for the ordeal.

EARL SKULE.

Nay, my lord Bishop, needs must we pray for God's voice in this matter.

HÅKON.

[*Deeply moved, holding* INGA *by the hand.*] It is done, then, that which my every fibre cried out against—that

[1] Pronounce *Sverrē*.

which has made my heart shrivel and writhe within me——

DAGFINN.

[*Turning towards the multitude.*] Ay, look upon this woman and bethink you, all that are gathered here! Who ever doubted her word, until certain folk required that it should be doubted.

PAUL FLIDA.

Doubt has whispered in every corner from the hour when Håkon the Pretender was borne, a little child, into King Inge's[1] hall.

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

And last winter it swelled to a roar, and sounded forth over the land, both north and south; I trow every man can bear witness to that.

HÅKON.

I myself can best bear witness to it. Therefore have I yielded to the counsel of many faithful friends, and humbled myself as no other chosen king has done for many a day. I have proved my birth by the ordeal, proved my right, as the son of Håkon Sverresson, to succeed to the throne of Norway. I will not now question who fostered the doubt, and made it, as the Earl's kinsman says, swell into a roar; but this I know, that I have suffered bitterly under it. I have been chosen king from boyhood, but little kingly honour has been shown me, even where it seemed I might look for it most securely. I will but remind you of last Palm Sunday in Nidaros,[2] when I went up to the altar to make my offering, and the

[1] Pronounce *Inghë*. [2] The old name for Trondhiem.

Archbishop turned away and made as though he saw me not, to escape greeting me as kings are wont to be greeted. Yet such slights I could easily have borne, had not open war been like to break loose in the land; that I must needs hinder.

DAGFINN.

It may be well for kings to hearken to counsels of prudence: but had my counsel been heard in this matter, it had not been with hot iron, but with cold steel that Håkon Håkonsson had called for judgment between himself and his foes.

HÅKON.

Curb yourself, Dagfinn; think what beseems the man who is to be foremost in the State.

EARL SKULE.

[*With a slight smile.*] 'Tis easy to call every one the King's foe who chimes not with the King's will. Methinks he is the King's worst foe who would counsel him against making good his right to the kingship.

HÅKON.

Who knows? Were my right alone in question, mayhap I had not paid so dear to prove it; but higher things are here at stake: my calling and my duty. Deep and warm is the faith within me—and I blush not to own it—that I alone am he who in these times can sway the land to its weal. Kingly birth begets kingly duty——

EARL SKULE.

There are others here who bear themselves the like fair witness.

SIGURD RIBBUNG.

That do I, and with full as good ground. My grandfather was King Magnus Erlingsson——

HÅKON.

Ay, if your father, Erling Steinvæg, was indeed King Magnus's son; but most folks deny it, and in that matter none has yet faced the ordeal.

SIGURD RIBBUNG.

The Ribbungs chose me as king of their own free will, whereas 'twas by threats that Dagfinn the Peasant and other Birchlegs[1] gained for you the name of King.

HÅKON.

Ay, so ill had you dealt with Norway that the stock of Sverrë had to claim its right with threats.

GUTHORM INGESSON.

I am of the stock of Sverrë as much as you——

DAGFINN.

But not in the true male line.

[1] The "Birkebeiner" or Birchlegs were at this period a political faction. They were so called because, at the time of their first appearance, when they seem to have been little more than bandits, they eked out their scanty attire by making themselves leggings of birch-bark. Norway at this time swarmed with factions, such as the "Bagler" or Croziers (Latin, *baculus*), so called because Bishop Nicholas was their chief, the Ribbungs, the Slittungs, etc., devoted, for the most part, to one or other of the many Pretenders to the crown.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

You come on the spindle side, Guthorm.

GUTHORM INGESSON.

Yet this I know, that my father, Ingë Bårdsson, was lawfully chosen king of Norway.

HÅKON.

Because none knew that Sverrë's grandson was alive. From the day that became known, he held the kingdom in trust for me—not otherwise.

EARL SKULE.

That cannot truly be said; Ingë was king all his days, with all lawful power and without reserve. 'Tis true enough that Guthorm has but little claim, for he was born out of wedlock; but I am King Ingë's lawfully begotten brother, and the law is with me if I claim, and take, his full inheritance.

DAGFINN.

Ah, Sir Earl, of a truth you have taken full inheritance, not of your father's wealth alone, but of all the goods Håkon Sverresson left behind him.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Not all, good Dagfinn. Respect the truth;—King Håkon has kept a brooch and the golden ring he wears on his arm.

HÅKON.

Be that as it will; with God's help I shall win myself wealth again. And now, ye barons and thanes, ye

churchmen and chieftains and men-at-arms, now it is time we held the folkmote, as has been agreed. I have sat with bound hands until this day; methinks no man will blame me for longing to have them loosed.

EARL SKULE.

There are others in like case, Håkon Håkonsson.

HÅKON.

[*His attention arrested.*] What mean you, Sir Earl?

EARL SKULE.

I mean that all we Pretenders have the same cause for longing. We have all alike been straitly bound, for none of us has known how far his right might reach.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

The Church has been even as unstable as the kingdom; but now must we abide by the sainted King Olaf's law.

DAGFINN.

[*Half aloud.*] Fresh subtleties!

[HÅKON'S *men gather more closely together.*

HÅKON.

[*With forced calmness, advances a couple of paces towards the* EARL.] I would fain think I have not rightly taken your meaning. The ordeal has made good my birthright to the kingdom, and therefore, as I deem, the folkmote has nought to do but to confirm my election, made at the Örething[1] six years ago.

[1] A "thing," or assembly, held from time to time on the "öre" or foreshore at the mouth of the river Nid, at Trondhiem.

SEVERAL OF THE EARL'S AND SIGURD'S MEN.

No, no! That we deny!

EARL SKULE.

'Twas with no such thought that we agreed to hold the folkmote here. The ordeal has not given you the kingdom; it has but proved your title to come forward to-day, along with the other Pretenders here present, and contend for the right you hold to be yours——

HÅKON.

[*Constraining himself to be calm.*] That means, in brief, that for six years I have unlawfully borne the name of King, and you, Sir Earl, have for six years unlawfully ruled the land as regent for me.

EARL SKULE.

In no wise. When my brother died, 'twas needful that some one should bear the kingly title. The Birchlegs, and most of all Dagfinn the Peasant, were active in your cause, and hastened your election through before we others could set forth our claims.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*To* HÅKON.] The Earl would say that that election gave you but the use of the kingly power, not the right to it.

EARL SKULE.

You have held all the marks of kingship; but Sigurd Ribbung and Guthorm Ingesson and I hold ourselves to

the full as near inheritors as you; and now shall the law judge between us, and say whose shall be the inheritance for all time.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

In truth, Earl Skule reads the case aright.

EARL SKULE.

There has been talk more than once in these years of both ordeal and folkmote; but something has ever come between. And, Sir Håkon, if you deemed your right for ever fixed by the first election, how came you to accept the ordeal?

DAGFINN.

[*Exasperated.*] To your swords, King's men, let t h e m decide!

MANY OF THE KING'S MEN.

[*Rushing forward.*] Down with the King's enemies!

EARL SKULE.

[*Calls to his men.*] Slay none! Wound none! Only keep them off.

HÅKON.

[*Restraining his men.*] Up with your blades, all who have drawn them!—Up with your blades, I say! [*Calmly.*] You make things tenfold worse for me by such doings.

EARL SKULE.

Even so are men flying at each other's throats all the country over. You see now, Håkon Håkonsson; does

not this show clearly what you have to do, if you care aught for the country's peace and the lives of men?

HÅKON.

[*After some reflection.*] Yes—I see it. [*Takes* INGA *by the hand and turns to one of those standing by him.*] Torkell, you were a trusty man in my father's guard; take this woman to your own abode and see you tend her well; she was very dear to Håkon Sverresson.—God bless you, my mother,—now I must gird me for the folkmote. [INGA *presses his hand, and goes with* TORKELL. HÅKON *is silent awhile, then steps forward and says with emphasis:*] The law shall decide, and it alone. Ye Birchlegs who, at the Örething, took me for your King, I free you from the oath ye sware to me. You, Dagfinn, are no longer my marshal; I will not appear with marshal or with guard,[1] with vassals or with henchmen. I am a poor man; all my inheritance is a brooch and this gold ring; —these are scant goods wherewith to reward so many good men's service. Now, ye other Pretenders, now we stand equal; I will have no advantage of you, save the right which I have from above—t h a t I neither can nor will share with any one.—Let the assembly-call be sounded, and then let God and the Holy King Olaf's law decide.

[*Goes out with his men to the left; blasts of trumpets and horns are heard in the distance.*

[1] The word *hird* is very difficult to render. It meant something between "court," "household," and "guard." I have never translated it "court," as that word seemed to convey an idea of peaceful civilisation foreign to the country and period; but I have used either "guard" or "household" as the context seemed to demand. *Hirdmand* I have generally rendered "man-at-arms." *Lendermand* I have represented by "baron"; *lagmand* and *sysselmand* by "thane"; and *stallare* by "marshal"—all mere rough approximations.

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

[*To the* EARL, *as the crowd is departing.*] Methought you seemed afraid during the ordeal, and now you look so glad and of good cheer.

EARL SKULE.

[*Well at ease.*] Marked you that he had Sverre's eyes as he spoke? Whether he or I be chosen king, the choice will be good.

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

[*Uneasily.*] But do not you give way. Think of all who stand or fall with your cause.

EARLE SKULE.

I stand now upon justice; I no longer fear to call upon Saint Olaf. [*Goes out to the left with his followers.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Hastening after* DAGFINN THE PEASANT.] All goes well, good Dagfinn, all goes well;—but keep the Earl far from the King when he is chosen;—see you keep them far apart! [*All go out to the left, behind the church.*

A hall in the Palace. In front, on the left, is a low window; on the right, the entrance-door; at the back, a larger door which leads into the King's Hall. By the window, a table; chairs and benches stand about.

LADY RAGNHILD *and* MARGRETE *enter by the smaller door;* SIGRID *follows immediately.*

LADY RAGNHILD.

In here?

MARGRETE.

do, if you care of men?

Ay, here it is darkest.

LADY RAGNHILD.

INGA

[*Goes to the window.*] And here we can look d*im.*] upon the mote-stead.

MARGRETE.

[*Looks out cautiously.*] Ay, there they are, all gathered behind the church. [*Turns, in tears.*] Yonder must now betide what will bring so much in its train.

LADY RAGNHILD.

Who will be master in this hall to-morrow?

MARGRETE.

Oh, hush! So heavy a day I had never thought to see.

LADY RAGNHILD.

It had to be; to rule in another's name was no full work for h i m.

MARGRETE.

Ay, it had to be; h e could never rest content with but the name of king.

LADY RAGNHILD.

Of whom speak you?

MARGRETE.

Of Håkon.

LADY RAGNHILD.

I spoke of the Earl.

MARGRETE.

There breathe not nobler men than they two.

LADY RAGNHILD.

See you Sigurd Ribbung? With what a look of evil cunning he sits there—like a wolf in chains.

MARGRETE.

Ay, see!—He folds his hands before him on his sword-hilt and rests his chin upon them.

LADY RAGNHILD.

He bites his beard and laughs——

MARGRETE.

'Tis an evil laugh.

LADY RAGNHILD.

He knows that none will further his cause;—'tis that which makes him wroth. Who is yonder thane that speaks now?

MARGRETE.

That is Gunnar Grionbak.

LADY RAGNHILD.

Is he for the Earl?

MARGRETE.

No, he is for the King——

LADY RAGNHILD.

[*Looking at her.*] For whom say you?

MARGRETE.

For Håkon Håkonsson.

LADY RAGNHILD.

[*Looks out; after a short pause.*] Where sits Guthorm Ingesson?—I see him not.

MARGRETE.

Behind his men, lowest of all there—in a long mantle.

LADY RAGNHILD.

Ay, there.

MARGRETE.

He looks as though he were ashamed——

LADY RAGNHILD.

That is for his mother's sake.

MARGRETE.

So looked not Håkon.

LADY RAGNHILD.

Who speaks now?

MARGRETE.

[*Looking out.*] Tord Skolle, the thane of Ranafylke.

LADY RAGNHILD.

Is h e for the Earl?

MARGRETE.

No—for Håkon.

LADY RAGNHILD.

How motionless the Earl sits listening!

MARGRETE.

Håkon seems thoughtful—but strong none the less. [*With animation.*] If there came a traveller from afar, he could pick out those two amongst all the thousand others.

LADY RAGNHILD.

See, Margrete! Dagfinn the Peasant drags forth a gilded chair for Håkon——

MARGRETE.

Paul Flida places one like it behind the Earl——

LADY RAGNHILD.

Håkon's men seek to hinder it!

MARGRETE.

The Earl holds fast to the chair——!

LADY RAGNHILD.

Håkon speaks wrathfully to him. [*Starts back, with a cry, from the window.*] Lord Jesus! Saw you his eyes —and his smile——! No, that was not the Earl!

MARGRETE.

[*Who has followed her in terror.*] 'Twas not Håkon either! Neither one nor the other!

SIGRID.

[*At the window.*] Oh pitiful! Oh pitiful!

MARGRETE.

Sigrid!

LADY RAGNHILD.

You here!

SIGRID.

Goes the path so low that leads up to the throne!

MARGRETE.

Oh, pray with us, that all be guided for the best.

LADY RAGNHILD.

[*White and horror-stricken, to* SIGRID.] Saw you him——? Saw you my husband——? His eyes and his smile—I should not have known him!

SIGRID.

Looked he like Sigurd Ribbung?

LADY RAGNHILD.

[*Softly.*] Ay, he looked like Sigurd Ribbung.

SIGRID.

Laughed he like Sigurd?

LADY RAGNHILD.

Ay, ay!

SIGRID.

Then must we all pray.

LADY RAGNHILD.

[*With the force of despair.*] The Earl must be chosen King! 'Twill work ruin in his soul if he be not the first man in the land!

SIGRID.

[*More loudly.*] Then must we all pray!

LADY RAGNHILD.

Hist! What is that? [*At the window.*] What shouts! All the men have risen; all the banners and standards wave in the wind.

SIGRID.

[*Seizes her by the arm.*] Pray, woman! Pray for your husband!

LADY RAGNHILD.

Ay, Holy King Olaf, give him all the power in this land!

SIGRID.

[*Wildly.*] None—none! Else is he lost!

LADY RAGNHILD.

He m u s t have the power. All the good in him will grow and blossom should he win it.—Look forth, Margrete! Listen! [*Starts back a step.*] All hands are lifted for an oath! [MARGRETE *listens at the window.*

LADY RAGNHILD.

God and St. Olaf, to whom do they swear?

SIGRID.

Pray!

[MARGRETE *listens, and with uplifted hand motions for silence.*

LADY RAGNHILD.

[*After a little while.*] Speak!

[*From the mote-stead is heard a loud blast of trumpets and horns.*

LADY RAGNHILD.

God and St. Olaf! To whom have they sworn?

[*A short pause.*

MARGRETE.

[*Turns her head and says:*] They have chosen Håkon Håkonsson king.

[*The music of the royal procession is heard, first in the distance and then nearer and nearer.* LADY RAGNHILD *clings weeping to* SIGRID, *who leads her quietly out on the right;* MARGRETE *remains im-*

movable, leaning against the window-frame. The KING'S *attendants open the great doors, disclosing the interior of the Hall, which is gradually filled by the procession from the mote-stead.*

HÅKON.

[*In the doorway, turning to* IVAR BODDE.] Bring me a pen and wax and silk—I have parchment here. [*Advances exultantly to the table and spreads some rolls of parchment upon it.*] Margrete, now am I King!

MARGRETE.

Hail to my lord and King!

HÅKON.

I thank you. [*Looks at her and takes her hand.*] Forgive me; I forgot that it must wound you.

MARGRETE.

[*Drawing her hand away.*] It did not wound me;—of a surety you are born to be king.

HÅKON.

[*With animation.*] Ay, must not all men own it, who remember how marvellously God and the saints have shielded me from all harm? I was but a year old when the Birchlegs bore me over the mountains, in frost and storm, and through the very midst of those who sought my life. At Nidaros I came scatheless from the Baglers[1] when they burnt the town with so great a slaughter, while

[1] See note, p. 161.

King Ingë himself barely saved his life by climbing on shipboard up the anchor-cable.

MARGRETE.

Your youth has been a hard one.

HÅKON.

[*Looking steadily at her.*] Methinks you might have made it easier.

MARGRETE.

I?

HÅKON.

You might have been so good a foster-sister to me, through all the years when we were growing up together.

MARGRETE.

But it fell out otherwise.

HÅKON.

Ay, it fell out otherwise;—we looked at each other, I from my corner, you from yours, but we seldom spoke—— [*Impatiently.*] What is keeping him? [IVAR BODDE *comes with the writing materials.*] Are you there? Give me the things!

[HÅKON *seats himself at the table and writes. A little while after,* EARL SKULE *comes in; then* DAGFINN THE PEASANT, BISHOP NICHOLAS *and* VEGARD VÆRADAL.

HÅKON.

[*Looks up and lays down his pen.*] Know you, Sir Earl, what I am writing here? [*The* EARL *approaches.*]

This is to my mother; I thank her for all her love, and kiss her a thousand times—here in the letter you understand. She is to be sent eastward to Borgasyssel, there to live with all queenly honours.

EARL SKULE.

You will not keep her in the palace?

HÅKON.

She is too dear to me, Earl;—a king must have none about him whom he loves too well. A king must act with free hands; he must stand alone; he must neither be led nor lured. There is so much to be mended in Norway.

[*Goes on writing.*

VEGARD VÆRADAL.

[*Softly to* BISHOP NICHOLAS.] 'Tis by my counsel he deals thus with Inga, his mother.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

I knew your hand in it at once.

VEGARD VÆRADAL.

But now one good turn deserves another.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Wait. I will keep my promise.

HÅKON.

[*Gives the parchment to* IVAR BODDE.] Fold it together and bear it to her yourself, with many loving greetings——

IVAR BODDE.

[*Who has glanced at the parchment.*] My lord—you write here—"to-day"——!

HÅKON.

The wind is fair for a southward course.

DAGFINN.

[*Slowly.*] Bethink you, my lord King, that she has lain all night on the altar-steps in prayer and fasting.

IVAR BODDE.

And she may well be weary after the ordeal.

HÅKON.

True, true;—my good, kind mother——! [*Collects himself.*] Well, if she be too weary, let her wait until to-morrow.

IVAR BODDE.

It shall be as you will. [*Puts another parchment forward.*] But this other, my lord.

HÅKON.

That other?—Ivar Bodde, I cannot.

DAGFINN.

[*Points to the letter for* INGA.] Yet you could do t h a t.

IVAR BODDE.

All things sinful must be put away.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Who has drawn near in the meantime.*] Bind the Earl's hands, King Håkon.

HÅKON.

[*In a low voice.*] Think you t h a t is needful?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

At no cheaper rate can you buy peace in the land.

HÅKON.

Then I can do it! Give me the pen! [*Writes.*

EARL SKULE.

[*To the* BISHOP, *who crosses to the right.*] You have the King's ear, it would seem.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

For your behoof.

EARL SKULE.

Say you so?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Before nightfall you will thank me.

[*He moves away.*

HÅKON.

[*Hands the* EARL *the parchment.*] Read that, Earl Skule.

EARL SKULE.

[*Reads, looks in surprise at the* KING, *and says in a low voice.*] You break with Kanga the Young?

HÅKON.

With Kanga whom I have loved more than all the world. From this day forward she must never more cross the King's path.

EARL SKULE.

This that you do is a great thing, Håkon. Mine own memory tells me what it must cost.

HÅKON.

Whoever is too dear to the King must away.—Tie up the letter. [*Gives it to* IVAR BODDE.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Bending over the chair.*] You have made a great stride towards the Earl's friendship, my lord King.

HÅKON.

[*Holds out his hand to him.*] I thank you, Bishop Nicholas; you counselled me for the best. Ask a grace of me, and I will grant it.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Will you?

HÅKON.

I promise it on my kingly faith.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Then make Vegard Væradal thane of Halogaland.

HÅKON.

Vegard? He is well-nigh the trustiest friend I have; I am loath to send him so far from me.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

The King's friend must be royally rewarded. Bind the Earl's hands as I have counselled you, and you will be secure for ever and a day.

HÅKON.

[*Takes a sheet of parchment.*] Vegard shall bear rule in Halogaland. [*Writing.*] I hereby grant it under my royal hand. [*The* BISHOP *retires.*

EARL SKULE.

[*Approaches the table.*] What write you now?

HÅKON.

[*Hands him the sheet.*] Read.

EARL SKULE.

[*Reads, and looks steadily at the* KING.] Vegard Væradal? In Halogaland?

HÅKON.

The northern part stands vacant.

EARL SKULE.

Bethink you that Andres Skialdarband[1] has also a charge in the north. They two are bitter foes;—Andres Skialdarband is of my following——

HÅKON.

[*Smiling and rising.*] And Vegard Væradal of mine. Therefore they must e'en make friends again, the sooner

[1] Pronounce *Shaldarband.*

the better. Henceforth there must be no enmity between the King's men and the Earl's.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Ha!—this may go too far. [*Approaches, uneasy.*

EARL SKULE.

Your thoughts are wise and deep, Håkon.

HÅKON.

[*Warmly.*] Earl Skule, to-day have I taken the kingdom from you—let your daughter share it with me!

EARL SKULE.

My daughter!

MARGRETE.

Oh, God!

HÅKON.

Margrete, will you be my Queen?

[MARGRETE *is silent.*

HÅKON.

[*Takes her hand.*] Answer me.

MARGRETE.

[*Softly.*] I will gladly be your wife.

EARL SKULE.

[*Pressing* HÅKON'S *hand.*] Peace and friendship from my heart!

HÅKON.

I thank you.

IVAR BODDE.

[*To* DAGFINN.] Heaven be praised; here is the dawn.

DAGFINN.

I almost believe it. Never before have I liked the Earl so well.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Behind him.*] Ever on your guard, good Dagfinn—ever on your guard.

IVAR BODDE.

[*To* VEGARD.] Now are you thane in Halogaland; here you have it under the King's hand.

[*Gives him the letter.*

VEGARD VÆRADAL.

I will thank the King for his favour another time.

[*About to go.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Stops him.*] Andres Skialdarband is an ugly neighbour; be not cowed by him.

VEGARD VÆRADAL.

No one has yet cowed Vegard Væradal. [*Goes.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Following.*] Be as rock and flint to Andres Skialdarband,—and, while I think on't, take my blessing with you.

IVAR BODDE.

[*Who has been waiting behind the* KING *with the parchments in his hand.*] Here are the letters, my lord.

HÅKON.

Good; give them to the Earl.

IVAR BODDE.

To the Earl? Will you not seal them?

HÅKON.

The Earl is wont to do that;—he holds the seal.

IVAR BODDE.

[*Softly.*] Ay, hitherto — while he was regent — but n o w !

HÅKON.

Now as before;—the Earl holds the seal.

[*Moves away.*

EARL SKULE.

Give me the letters, Ivar Bodde.

[*Goes to the table with them, takes out the Great Seal which he wears under his girdle, and seals the letters during the following.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Muttering.*] Håkon Håkonsson is King—and the Earl holds the royal seal;—I like that—I like that.

HÅKON.

What says my lord Bishop?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

I say that God and St. Olaf watch over their holy church. [*Goes into the King's Hall.*

HÅKON.

[*Approaching* MARGRETE.] A wise queen can do great things in the land: I chose you fearlessly, for I know you are wise.

MARGRETE.

Only t h a t ?

HÅKON.

What mean you?

MARGRETE.

Nothing, my lord, nothing.

HÅKON.

And you will bear me no grudge if for my sake you have had to forgo fair hopes?

MARGRETE.

I have forgone no fair hopes for your sake.

HÅKON.

And you will stand ever near me, and give me good counsel?

MARGRETE.

I would fain stand near to you.

HÅKON.

And give me good counsel. I thank you for that; a woman's counsel profits every man, and henceforth I have none but you—my mother I had to send away——

MARGRETE.

Ay, she was too dear to you——

HÅKON.

And I am King. Farewell then, Margrete! You are so young yet; but next summer shall our bridal be,—and from that hour I swear to keep you by my side in all seemly faith and honour.

MARGRETE.

[*Smiles sadly.*] Ay, 'twill be long, I know, ere you send me away.

HÅKON.

[*Brightly.*] Send you away? That will I never do.

MARGRETE.

[*With tears in her eyes.*] No, that Håkon does only to those who are too dear to him.

[*She goes towards the entrance door.* HÅKON *gazes thoughtfully after her.*

LADY RAGNHILD.

[*From the right.*] The King and the Earl tarry here so long! My fears are killing me;—Margrete, what has the King said and done?

MARGRETE.

Oh, much, much! Last of all, he chose a thane and a Queen.

LADY RAGNHILD.

You, Margrete?

MARGRETE.

[*Throws her arms round her mother's neck.*] Yes!

LADY RAGNHILD.

You are to be Queen!

MARGRETE.

Queen only;—but I think I am glad even of that.

[*She and her mother go out to the right.*

EARL SKULE.

[*To* IVAR BODDE.] Here are our letters; bear them to the King's mother and to Kanga.

[IVAR BODDE *bows and goes.*

DAGFINN.

[*In the doorway of the hall.*] The Archbishop of Nidaros craves leave to offer King Håkon Håkonsson his homage.

HÅKON.

[*Draws a deep breath.*] At last, then, I am King of Norway.

EARL SKULE.

[*Places the Great Seal in his girdle.*] But *I* rule the realm.

ACT SECOND

Banquet Hall in the Palace at Bergen. A large bay-window in the middle of the back wall, along which there is a daïs with seats for the ladies. Against the left wall stands the throne, raised some steps above the floor; in the centre of the opposite wall is the great entrance door. Banners, standards, shields and weapons, with many-coloured draperies, hang from the wall-timbers and from the carven rafters. Around the hall stand drinking-tables, with flagons, horns, and beakers.

KING HÅKON *sits upon the daïs, with* MARGRETE, SIGRID, LADY RAGNHILD, *and many noble ladies.* IVAR BODDE *stands behind the* King's *chair. Round the drinking-tables are seated the King's and the Earl's men, with guests. At the foremost table on the right sit, among others,* DAGFINN THE PEASANT, GREGORIUS JONSSON, *and* PAUL FLIDA. EARL SKULE *and* BISHOP NICHOLAS *are playing chess at a table on the left. The* Earl's *house-folk go to and fro, bearing cans of liquor. From an adjoining room, music is heard during the following scene.*

DAGFINN.

The fifth day now wears on, yet the henchmen are none the less nimble at setting forth the brimming flagons.

PAUL FLIDA.

It was never the Earl's wont to stint his guests.

DAGFINN.

No, so it would seem. So royal a bridal-feast was never seen in Norway before.

PAUL FLIDA.

Earl Skule has never before given a daughter in marriage.

DAGFINN.

True, true; the Earl is a mighty man.

A MAN-AT-ARMS.

He holds a third part of the kingdom. That is more than any earl has held heretofore.

PAUL FLIDA.

But the King's part is larger.

DAGFINN.

We talk not of that here; we are friends now, and fully at one. [*Drinks to* PAUL.] So let King be King and Earl be Earl.

PAUL FLIDA.

[*Laughs.*] 'Tis easy to hear that you are a King's man.

DAGFINN.

That should the Earl's men also be.

PAUL FLIDA.

Never. We have sworn fealty to the Earl, not to the King.

DAGFINN.

That may yet have to be done.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*To the* EARL, *under cover of the game.*] Hear you what Dagfinn the Peasant says?

EARL SKULE.

[*Without looking up.*] I hear.

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

[*Looking steadily at* DAGFINN.] Has the King thoughts of that?

DAGFINN.

Nay, nay,—let be;—no wrangling to-day.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

The King would force your men to swear him fealty, Earl.

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

[*Louder.*] Has the King thoughts of that, I ask?

DAGFINN.

I will not answer. Let us drink to peace and friendship between the King and the Earl. The ale is good.

PAUL FLIDA.

It has had time enough to mellow.

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

Three times has the Earl prepared the bridal—three times the King promised to come—three times he came not.

DAGFINN.

Blame the Earl for t h a t : he gave us plenty to do in Viken.

PAUL FLIDA.

'Tis said Sigurd Ribbung gave you still more to do in Vermeland.

DAGFINN.

[*Flaring up.*] Ay, and who was it that let Sigurd Ribbung slip through their fingers?

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

Sigurd Ribbung fled from us at Nidaros, that all men know.

DAGFINN.

But no man knows that you did aught to hinder him.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*To the* EARL, *who is pondering on a move.*] Hear you, Earl? It was you who let Sigurd Ribbung escape.

EARL SKULE.

[*Makes a move.*] That is an old story.

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

Have you not heard, then, of the Icelander Andres Torsteinsson, Sigurd Ribbung's friend——

DAGFINN.

Ay; when Sigurd had escaped, you hanged the Icelander—that I know.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Makes a move and says laughingly to the* EARL.] I take the pawn, Sir Earl.[1]

EARL SKULE.

[*Aloud.*] Take him; a pawn is of small account.
[*Makes a move.*

DAGFINN.

Ay; that the Icelander found to his cost, when Sigurd Ribbung escaped to Vermeland.

[*Suppressed laughter amongst the King's men; the conversation is continued in a low tone; presently a man comes in and whispers to* GREGORIUS JONSSON.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Then I move here, and you have lost.

EARL SKULE.

So it would seem.

[1] Bishop Nicholas's speech, "Nu slår jeg bonden, herre jarl," means literally, "Now I strike (or slay) the peasant"; the pawn being called in Norwegian "bonde," peasant, as in German "Bauer." Thus in this speech and the next the Bishop and the Earl are girding at Dagfinn the Peasant. [Our own word "pawn" comes from the Spanish *peon*=a foot-soldier or day-labourer.]

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Leaning back in his chair.*] You did not guard the king well at the last.

EARL SKULE.

[*Strews the pieces topsy-turvy and rises.*] I have long been weary of guarding kings.

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

[*Approaches and says in a low tone.*] Sir Earl, Jostein [1] Tamb sends word that the ship now lies ready for sea.

EARL SKULE.

[*Softly.*] Good. [*Takes out a sealed parchment.*] Here is the letter.

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

[*Shaking his head.*] Earl, Earl,—is t h i s well bethought?

EARL SKULE.

What?

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

It bears the King's seal.

EARL SKULE.

I am acting for the King's good.

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

Then let the King himself reject the offer.

[1] Pronounce *Yostein.*

EARL SKULE.

That he will not, if he has his own way. His whole heart is bent on cowing the Ribbungs, therefore he is fain to secure himself on other sides.

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

Your way may be wise,—but it is dangerous.

EARL SKULE.

Leave that to me. Take the letter, and bid Jostein sail forthwith.

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

It shall be as you command.

[*Goes out to the right, and presently comes in again.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*To the* EARL.] You have much to see to, it would seem.

EARL SKULE.

But small thanks for it.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

The King has risen.

[HÅKON *comes down; all the men rise from the tables.*

HÅKON

[*To the* BISHOP.] We are rejoiced to see you bear up so bravely and well through all these days of merriment.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

There comes a flicker now and again, my lord King; but 'twill scarce last long. I have lain sick all the winter through.

HÅKON.

Ay, ay,—you have lived a strong life, rich in deeds of fame.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Shakes his head.*] Ah, 'tis little enough I have done, and I have much still left to do. If I but knew whether I should have time for it all!

HÅKON.

The living must take up the tasks of those who go before, honoured lord; we all have the welfare of the land at heart. [*Turns to the* EARL.] I marvel much at one thing: that neither of our thanes from Halogaland has come to the bridal.

EARL SKULE.

True; I doubted not that Andres Skialdarband would be here.

HÅKON.

[*Smiling.*] And Vegard Væradal too.

EARL SKULE.

Ay, Vegard too.

HÅKON.

[*In jest.*] And I trust you would now have received my old friend better than you did seven years ago on

Oslo wharf, when you stabbed him in the cheek so that the blade cut its way out.

EARL SKULE.

[*With a forced laugh.*] Ay, the time that Gunnulf, your mother's brother, cut off the right hand of Sira Eiliv, my best friend and counsellor.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Merrily.*] And when Dagfinn the Peasant and the men-at-arms set a strong night-watch on the King's ship, saying that the King was unsafe in the Earl's ward?

HÅKON.

[*Seriously.*] Those days are old and forgotten.

DAGFINN.

[*Approaching.*] Now may we sound the call to the weapon-sports on the green, if so please you, my lord.

HÅKON.

Good. To-day will we give up to nought but merriment; to-morrow we must turn our thoughts again to the Ribbungs and the Earl of Orkney.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Ay, he denies to pay tribute, is it not so?

HÅKON.

Were I once well rid of the Ribbungs, I would myself fare westward.

[HÅKON *goes towards the daïs, gives his hand to* MARGRETE, *and leads her out to the right; the others gradually follow.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*To* IVAR BODDE.] Who is the man called Jostein Tamb?

IVAR BODDE.

There is a trader from Orkney who bears that name.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

From Orkney? So, so! And now he sails home again?

IVAR BODDE.

So I think.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Softly.*] With a precious freight, Ivar Bodde.

IVAR BODDE.

Corn and raiment, most like.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

And a letter from Earl Skule.

IVAR BODDE.

[*Starting.*] To whom?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

I know not; it bore the King's seal——

IVAR BODDE.

[*Seizes him by the arm.*] Lord Bishop,—is it as you say?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Hush! Do not mix me up in the matter. [*Retires.*

IVAR BODDE.

Then must I straightway—— Dagfinn the Peasant! Dagfinn! Dagfinn——!

[*Pushes through the crowd towards the door.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*In a tone of commiseration, to* GREGORIUS JONSSON.] Never a day but one or another must suffer in goods or freedom.

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

Who is it now?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

A poor trader,—Jostein Tamb methinks they called him.

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

Jostein——?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Dagfinn the Peasant would forbid him to set sail.

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

Dagfinn would forbid him, say you?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

He went even now.

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

Pardon, my lord; I must make speed——

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Ay, do even so, my dear lord;—Dagfinn the Peasant is so hasty.

[GREGORIUS JONSSON *hastens out to the right along with the remainder of the company; only* EARL SKULE *and* BISHOP NICHOLAS *are left behind in the hall.*

EARL SKULE.

[*Walks up and down in deep thought; he seems suddenly to awaken; looks round him, and says:*] How still it has become here of a sudden!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

The King has gone.

EARL SKULE.

And every one has followed him.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

All, save us.

EARL SKULE.

It is a great thing to be King.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Tentatively.*] Are you fain to try it, Earl?

EARL SKULE.

[*With a serious smile.*] I have tried it; every night that brings me sleep makes me King of Norway.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Dreams forbode.

EARL SKULE.

Ay, and tempt.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Not you, surely. In bygone days, that I could understand—but now, when you hold a third part of the kingdom, rule as the first man in the land, and are the Queen's father——

EARL SKULE.

Now most of all—now most of all.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Hide nothing! Confess; for verily I can see a great pain is gnawing you.

EARL SKULE.

Now most of all, I say. T h i s is the great curse that lies upon my whole life: to stand so near to the highest,—with an abyss between. One leap, and on the other side are the kingship, and the purple robe, the throne, the might, and all! I have it daily before my eyes—but can never reach it.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

True, Earl, true.

EARL SKULE.

When they made Guthorm Sigurdsson king, I was in the full strength of my youth; it was as though a

voice cried aloud within me: Away with the child,—I am the man, the strong man!—But Guthorm was the king's son; there yawned an abyss between me and the throne.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

And you dared not venture——

EARL SKULE.

Then Erling Steinvæg was chosen by the Slittungs. The voice cried within me again: Skule is a greater chieftain than Erling Steinvæg! But I must needs have broken with the Birchlegs,—t h a t was the abyss that time.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

And Erling became king of the Slittungs, and after of the Ribbungs, and still you waited!

EARL SKULE.

I waited for Guthorm to die.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

And Guthorm died, and Inge Bårdsson, your brother, became king.

EARL SKULE.

Then I waited for my brother's death. He was sickly from the first; every morning, when we met at holy mass, I would cast stolen glances to see whether his sickness increased. Every twitch of pain that crossed his face was as a puff of wind in my sails, and bore me nearer to the throne. Every sigh he breathed

in his agony sounded to me like an echoing trumpet-blast, like a herald from afar, proclaiming that the throne should soon be mine. Thus I tore up by the roots every thought of brotherly kindness; and Inge died, and Håkon came—and the Birchlegs made h i m king.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

And you waited.

EARL SKULE.

Methought help must come from above. I felt the kingly strength within me, and I was growing old; every day that passed was a day taken from my life-work. Each evening I thought: To-morrow will come the miracle that shall strike him down and set me in the empty seat.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Small was then Håkon's power; he was no more than a child; it wanted but a single step from you—yet you took it not.

EARL SKULE.

That step was hard to take; it would have parted me from my kindred and from all my friends.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Ay, t h e r e is the rub, Earl Skule,—t h a t is the curse which has lain upon your life. You would fain know every way open at need,—you dare not break all your bridges and keep only one, defend it alone, and on it conquer or fall. You lay snares for your foe, you set traps for his feet, and hang sharp swords over his head;

you strew poison in every dish, and you spread a hundred nets for him; but when he walks into your toils you dare not draw the string; if he stretch out his hand for the poison, you think it safer he should fall by the sword; if he is like to be caught in the morning, you hold it wiser to wait till eventide.

EARL SKULE.

[*Looking earnestly at him.*] And what would y o u do, my lord Bishop?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Speak not of me; my work is to build up thrones in this land, not to sit on them and rule.

EARL SKULE.

[*After a short pause.*] Answer me o n e thing, my honoured lord, and answer me truly. How comes it that Håkon can follow the straight path so unflinchingly? He is no wiser, no bolder than I.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Who does the greatest work in this world?

EARL SKULE.

The greatest man.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

But who is the greatest man?

EARL SKULE.

The bravest.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

So says the warrior. A priest would say: the man of greatest faith,—a philosopher: the most learned. But it is none of these, Earl Skule. The most fortunate man[1] is the greatest man. It is the most fortunate man that does the greatest deeds—he whom the cravings of his time seize like a passion, begetting thoughts he himself cannot fathom, and pointing to paths which lead he knows not whither, but which he follows and must follow till he hears the people shout for joy, and, looking around him with wondering eyes, finds that he has done a mighty deed.

EARL SKULE.

Ay, there is that unswerving confidence in Håkon.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

It is that which the Romans called *ingenium*.—Truly I am not strong in Latin; but 'twas called *ingenium*.

EARL SKULE.

[*Thoughtfully at first, afterwards in increasing excitement.*] Is Håkon made of other clay than mine? The fortunate man?—Ay, does not everything thrive with him? Does not everything shape itself for the best, when he is concerned? Even the peasants note it; they say the trees bear fruit twice, and the fowls hatch out two broods every summer, whilst Håkon is king. Vermeland, where he burned and harried, stands smiling

[1] *Den lykkeligste mand.* The word *lykke* means not only luck or fortune, but happiness. To render *lykkeligste* completely, we should require a word in which the ideas "fortunate" and "happy" should be blent.

with its houses built afresh, and its corn-lands bending heavy-eared before the breeze. 'Tis as though blood and ashes fertilised the land where Håkon's armies pass; 'tis as though the Lord clothed with double verdure what Håkon has trampled down; 'tis as though the holy powers made haste to blot out all evil in his track. And how easy has been his path to the throne! He needed that Inge should die early, and Inge died: his youth needed to be watched and warded, and his men kept watch and ward around him; he needed the ordeal, and his mother arose and bore the iron for him.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*With an involuntary outburst.*] But we—we two——!

EARL SKULE.

We?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

You, I would say—what of you?

EARL SKULE.

The right is Håkon's, Bishop.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

The right is his, for he is the fortunate one; 'tis even the summit of fortune, to have the right. But by what right has Håkon the right, and not you?

EARL SKULE.

[*After a short pause.*] There are things I pray God to save me from thinking upon.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Saw you never an old picture in Christ's Church at Nidaros? It shows the Deluge rising and rising over all the hills, so that there is but one single peak left above the waters. Up it clambers a whole household, father and mother and son and son's wife and children;—and the son is hurling the father back into the flood to gain better footing; and he will cast his mother down and his wife and all his children, to win to the top himself;—for up there he sees a handsbreadth of ground, where he may keep life in him for an hour.—That, Earl, that is the saga of wisdom, and the saga of every wise man.

EARL SKULE.

But the right!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

The son h a d the right. He had strength, and the craving for life;—fulfil your cravings and use your strength: so much right has every man.

EARL SKULE.

Ay, for that which is good.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Words, empty words! There is neither good nor evil, up nor down, high nor low. You must forget such words, else will you never take the last stride, never leap the abyss. [*In a subdued voice and insistently.*] You must not hate a party or a cause for that the party or the cause would have t h i s and not t h a t; but you must hate every man of a party for that he is against you, and you must hate all who

gather round a cause, for that the cause clashes with your will. Whatever is helpful to you, is good—whatever lays stumbling-blocks in your path is evil.

EARL SKULE.

[*Gazing thoughtfully before him.*] What has that throne not cost me, which yet I have not reached! And what has it cost Håkon, who now sits in it so securely! I was young, and I forswore my sweet secret love to ally myself with a powerful house. I prayed to the saints that I might be blessed with a son—I got only daughters.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Håkon will have sons, Earl—mark that!

EARL SKULE.

[*Crossing to the window on the right.*] Ay—all things fall out to Håkon's wish.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

And you—will you suffer yourself to be outlawed from happiness all your life through? Are you blind? See you not that it is a stronger might than the Birchlegs that stands at Håkon's back, and furthers all his life-work? He has help from above, from—from those that are against you—from those that have been your enemies, even from your birth! And will you bow before these your enemies? Rouse you, man; straighten your back! To what end got you your masterful soul? Bethink you that the first great deed in all the world was done by one who rose against a mighty realm!

EARL SKULE.

Who?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

The angel who rose against the light!

EARL SKULE.

And was hurled into the bottomless pit——

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Wildly.*] And founded there a kingdom, and made himself a king, a mighty king—mightier than any of the ten thousand—earls up yonder!

[*Sinks down upon a bench beside the table.*

EARL SKULE.

[*Looks long at him.*] Bishop Nicholas, are you something more or something less than a man?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Smiling.*] I am in the state of innocence: I know not good from evil.

EARL SKULE.

[*Half to himself.*] Why did they send me into the world, if they meant not to order it better for me? Håkon has so firm and unswerving a faith in himself—all his men have so firm and unswerving a faith in him——

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Let it not be seen that y o u have no such faith in yourself! Speak as though you had it, swear great oaths that you have it—and all will believe you.

EARL SKULE.

Had I a son! Had I but a son, to take all the great heritage after me!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Eagerly.*] Earl—if you h a d a son?

EARL SKULE

I have none.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Håkon will have sons.

EARL SKULE.

[*Wringing his hands.*] And is king-born!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Rising.*] Earl—if he were not so?

EARL SKULE.

Has he not proved it? The ordeal——

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

And if he were not—in spite of the ordeal?

EARL SKULE.

Do you say that God lied in the issue of the ordeal?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

What was it Inga of Varteig called upon God to witness?

EARL SKULE.

That the child she bore in the eastland, in Borgasysel, was the son of Håkon Sverresson.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Nods, looks round, and says softly.*] And if King Håkon were not that child?

EARL SKULE.

[*Starts a step backwards.*] Great God——! [*Controls himself.*] It is beyond belief.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Hearken to me, Earl Skule. I have lived seventy years and six; it begins to go sharply downhill with me now, and I dare not take this secret with me over yonder——

EARL SKULE.

Speak, speak! Is he not the son of Håkon Sverresson?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Hear me. It was known to none that Inga was with child. Håkon Sverresson was lately dead, and doubtless she feared Inge Bårdsson, who was then king, and you, and—well, and the Baglers [1] too mayhap. She was brought to bed secretly in the house of Trond the Priest, in Heggen parish, and after nine days she departed homewards; but the child remained a whole year with the priest, she not daring to look to it, and none knowing that it breathed save Trond and his two sons.

[1] See note, p. 161.

EARL SKULE.

Ay, ay—and then?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

When the child was a year old, it could scarce be kept hidden longer. So Inga made the matter known to Erlend of Huseby—an old Birchleg of Sverre's days, as you know.

EARL SKULE.

Well?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

He and other chiefs from the Uplands took the child, bore it over the mountains in midwinter, and brought it to the King, who was then at Nidaros.

EARL SKULE.

And yet you can say that——?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Needless to say, 'twas a dangerous task for a humble priest to rear a king's child. So soon as the child was born, he laid the matter before one of his superiors in the church, and prayed for his counsel. This his superior bade Trond send the true king's son with secrecy to a place of safety, and give Inga another, if she or the Birchlegs should afterwards ask for her child.

EARL SKULE.

[*Indignantly.*] And who was the hound that gave that counsel?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

It was I.

EARL SKULE.

You? Ay, you have ever hated the race of Sverre.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

I deemed it not safe for the King's son to fall into your hands.

EARL SKULE.

But the priest——?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Promised to do as I bade.

EARL SKULE.

[*Seizing him by the arm.*] And Håkon is the other child?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

If the priest kept his promise.

EARL SKULE.

If he kept it?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Trond the Priest departed the land the same winter that the child was brought to King Inge. He journeyed to Thomas Becket's grave, and afterwards abode in England till his death.

EARL SKULE.

He departed the land, say you? Then must he have changed the children and dreaded the vengeance of the Birchlegs.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Or he did not change the children, and dreaded my vengeance.

EARL SKULE.

Which surmise hold you for the truth?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Either may well be true.

EARL SKULE.

But the priest's sons of whom you spoke?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

They went with the crusaders to the Holy Land.

EARL SKULE.

And there have since been no tidings of them?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Ay, tidings there have been.

EARL SKULE.

Where are they?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

They were drowned in the Greek Sea on the journey forth.

EARL SKULE.

And Inga——?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Knows nought, either of the priest's confession or of my counsel.

EARL SKULE.

Her child was but nine days old when she left it, you said?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Ay, and the child she next saw was over a year——

EARL SKULE.

Then no living creature can here bring light! [*Paces rapidly to and fro.*] Almighty God, can this be true? Håkon—the King—he who holds sway over all this land, not born of royal blood!—And why should it not be like enough? Has not all fortune miraculously followed him?—Why not this also, to be taken as a child from a poor cottar's hut and laid in a king's cradle——?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Whilst the whole people believes that he is the king's son——

EARL SKULE.

Whilst h e h i m s e l f believes it, Bishop—t h a t is the heart of his fortune, t h a t is the girdle of strength! [*Goes to the window.*] See how bravely he sits his horse! None rides as he does. His eyes are filled with laughing, dancing sunshine; he looks forth into the day as though he knew himself created to go forward, ever forward. [*Turns towards the* BISHOP.] I am a king's arm, mayhap a king's brain as well; but he is the whole King.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Yet no king after all, mayhap.

EARL SKULE.

Mayhap no king after all.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Lays his hand on the Earl's shoulder.*] Hearken to me, Earl Skule——

EARL SKULE.

[*Still looking out.*] There sits the Queen. Håkon speaks gently to her; she turns red and white with joy. He took her to wife because it was wise to choose the daughter of the mightiest man in the land. There was then no thought of love for her in his heart;—but it will come; Håkon has fortune with him. She will shed light over his life—— [*Stops, and cries out in wonder.*] What is t h i s ?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

What?

EARL SKULE.

Dagfinn the Peasant bursts violently through the crowd. Now he is giving the King some tidings.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Looking out from behind the* EARL.] Håkon seems angered—does he not? He clenches his fist——

EARL SKULE.

He looks hitherward—what can it be? [*About to go.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Holding him back.*] Hearken to me, Earl Skule—there may yet be one means of winning assurance as to Håkon's right.

EARL SKULE.

One means, you say?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Trond the Priest ere he died, wrote a letter telling his whole tale, and took the sacrament in witness of its truth.

EARL SKULE.

And that letter—for God's pity's sake—where is it?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

You must know that—— [*Looks towards the door.*] Hush!—here comes the King.

EARL SKULE.

The letter, Bishop—the letter!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

The King is here.

[HÅKON *enters, followed by his* Guard *and many guests. Immediately afterwards,* MARGRETE *appears; she seems anxious and alarmed, and is about to rush up to the* King, *when she is restrained by* LADY RAGNHILD, *who, with other ladies, has followed her.* SIGRID *stands somewhat apart, towards the back. The* EARL'S *men appear uneasy, and gather in a group on the right, where* SKULE *is standing, but some way behind him.*

HÅKON.

[*In strong but repressed excitement.*] Earl Skule, who is king in this land?

EARL SKULE.

Who is king?

HÅKON.

That was my question. I bear the kingly title, but who holds the kingly might?

EARL SKULE.

The kingly might should dwell with him who has the kingly right.

HÅKON.

So should it be; but is it so?

EARL SKULE.

Do you summon me to judgment?

HÅKON.

That I do; for that right I have toward every man in the land.

EARL SKULE.

I fear not to answer for my dealings.

HÅKON.

Well for us all if you can. [*Mounts a step of throne-daïs, and leans upon one arm of the throne.*] Here stand I as your king, and ask: Know you that Jon, Earl of Orkney, has risen against me?

EARL SKULE.

Yes.

HÅKON.

That he denies to pay me tribute?

EARL SKULE.

Yes.

HÅKON.

And is it true that you, Sir Earl, have this day sent him a letter?

EARL SKULE.

Who says so?

IVAR BODDE.

That do I.

DAGFINN.

Jostein Tamb dared not deny to carry it, since it bore the King's seal.

HÅKON.

You write to the King's foes under the King's seal, although the King knows nought of what is written?

EARL SKULE.

So have I done for many a year, with your good will.

HÅKON.

Ay, in the days of your regency.

EARL SKULE.

Never have you had aught but good thereby. Earl Jon wrote to me praying that I would mediate on his

behalf; he offered peace, but on terms dishonourable to the King. The war in Vermeland has weighed much upon your mind; had this matter been left to you, Earl Jon had come too lightly off. I can deal better with him.

HÅKON.

'Twas our will to deal with him ourself.—And what answer made you?

EARL SKULE.

Read my letter.

HÅKON.

Give it me!

EARL SKULE.

I deemed you had it.

DAGFINN.

Nay, you know better than that. Gregorius Jonsson was too swift of foot; when we came on board, the letter was gone.

EARL SKULE.

[*Turns to* GREGORIUS JONSSON.] Sir Baron, give the King the letter.

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

[*Coming close to him, uneasily.*] Hearken, Earl——!

EARL SKULE.

What now?

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

[*Softly.*] Bethink you, there were sharp words in it concerning the King.

EARL SKULE.

My words I shall answer for. The letter!

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

I have it not.

EARL SKULE.

You have it not?

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

Dagfinn the Peasant was at our heels. I snatched the letter from Jostein Tamb, tied a stone to it——

EARL SKULE.

Well?

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

It lies at the bottom of the fiord.

EARL SKULE.

You have done ill—ill.

HÅKON.

I await the letter, Sir Earl.

EARL SKULE.

I cannot give it you.

HÅKON.

You c a n n o t!

EARL SKULE.

[*Advancing a step towards the* KING.] My pride brooks not to be put to shifts, as you and your men would call it——

HÅKON.

[*Controlling his rising wrath.*] And so——?

EARL SKULE.

In one word—I w i l l not give it you!

HÅKON.

Then you defy me?

EARL SKULE.

Since so it must be—yes, I defy you.

IVAR BODDE.

[*Forcibly.*] Now, my lord King, I scarce think you or any man can now need further proof!

DAGFINN.

Nay, now I think we know the Earl's mind.

HÅKON.

[*Coldly, to the* EARL.] You will hand the Great Seal to Ivar Bodde.

MARGRETE.

[*Rushes with clasped hands towards the daïs, where the* KING *is standing.*] Håkon be a kind and gracious husband to me!

[HÅKON *makes an imperative gesture towards her; she hides her face in her veil, and goes up towards her mother again.*

EARL SKULE.

[*To* IVAR BODDE.] Here is the Great Seal.

IVAR BODDE.

This was to be the last evening of the feast. It has ended in a heavy sorrow for the King; but sooner or later it needs must come, and methinks every true man must rejoice that it h a s come.

EARL SKULE.

And I think every true man must feel bitter wrath to see a priest thus make mischief between us Birchlegs; —ay, Birchlegs, I say; for I am every whit as good a Birchleg as the King or any of his men. I am of the same stock, the stock of Sverre, the kingly stock—but you, Priest, you have built up a wall of distrust around the King, and shut me out from him; that has been your task this many a year.

PAUL FLIDA.

[*Enraged, to the bystanders.*] Earl's men! Shall we abide this longer?

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

[*Steps forward.*] No, we can and will no more abide it. 'Tis time to say it plainly—none of the Earl's men can serve the King in full trust and love, so long as Ivar Bodde comes and goes in the palace, and makes bad blood between us.

PAUL FLIDA.

Priest! I bid you look to life and limb, wheresoever I meet you—in the field, on shipboard, or in any unconsecrated house.

MANY EARL'S MEN.

I too! I too! You are an outlaw to us!

IVAR BODDE.

God forbid that I should stand between the King and so many mighty chieftains.—Håkon, my gracious lord, my soul bears me witness that I have served you in all faithfulness. True, I have warned you against the Earl; but if I have ever done him wrong, I pray God forgive me. Now have I no more to do in the palace; here is your Seal; take it into your own hands; there it should have rested long ago.

HÅKON.

[*Who has come down from the dais.*] You shall remain!

IVAR BODDE.

I cannot. If I did, my conscience would gnaw and rend me night and day. Greater evil can no man do in these times than to hold the King and the Earl asunder.

HÅKON.

Ivar Bodde, I command you to remain!

IVAR BODDE.

If the Holy King Olaf should rise from his silver shrine to bid me stay, still I needs must go. [*Places the Seal in the* KING'S *hand.*] Farewell, my noble master! God bless and prosper you in all your work!

[*Goes out through the crowd, to the right.*

HÅKON.

[*Gloomily, to the* EARL *and his men.*] There have I lost a trusty friend for your sakes; what requital can you offer to make good that loss?

EARL SKULE.

I offer myself and all my friends.

HÅKON.

I almost fear 'twill not suffice. Now must I gather round me all the men I can fully trust. Dagfinn the Peasant, let a messenger set out forthwith for Halogaland; Vegard Væradal must be recalled.

DAGFINN.

[*Who has been standing somewhat towards the back, in conversation with a man in travelling dress who has entered the hall, approaches and says with emotion:*] Vegard cannot come, my lord.

HÅKON.

How know you that?

DAGFINN.

I have even now had tidings of him.

HÅKON.

What tidings?

DAGFINN.

That Vegard Væradal is slain.

MANY VOICES.

Slain!

HÅKON.

Who slew him?

DAGFINN.

Andres Skialdarband, the Earl's friend.
[*A short pause; uneasy whispers pass among the men.*

HÅKON.

Where is the messenger?

DAGFINN.

[*Leading the man forward.*] Here, my lord King.

HÅKON.

What caused the slaying?

THE MESSENGER.

That no man knows. The talk fell upon the Finnish tribute, and on a sudden Andres sprang up and gave him his death-wound.

HÅKON.

Had there been quarrels between them before?

THE MESSENGER.

Ever and anon. Andres would often say that a wise councillor here in the south had written to him that he should be as rock and flint toward Vegard Væradal.

DAGFINN.

Strange! Ere Vegard set forth he told me that a wise councillor had said he should be as rock and flint toward Andres Skialdarband.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Spitting.*] Shame upon such councillors.

HÅKON.

We will not question more closely from what root this wrong has grown. Two faithful souls have I lost this day. I could weep for Vegard, but 'tis no time for weeping; it must be life for life. Sir Earl, Andres Skialdarband is your sworn retainer; you offered me all service in requital for Ivar Bodde. I take you at your word, and look to you to see that this misdeed be avenged.

EARL SKULE.

Of a truth, bad angels are at work between us to-day. On any other of my men, I would have suffered you to avenge the murder——

HÅKON.

[*Expectantly.*] Well?

EARL SKULE.

But not on Andres Skialdarband.

HÅKON.

[*Flashing out.*] Will you shield the murderer?

EARL SKULE.

T h i s murderer I m u s t shield.

HÅKON.

And the reason?

EARL SKULE.

That none but God in heaven may know.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Softly, to* DAGFINN.] I know it.

DAGFINN.

And I suspect it.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Say nought, good Dagfinn!

HÅKON.

Earl, I will believe as long as I may, that you mean not in good sooth what you have said to me——

EARL SKULE.

Were it my own father Andres Skialdarband had slain, he should still go free. Ask me no more.

HÅKON.

Good. Then we ourselves must do justice in the matter!

EARL SKULE.

[*With an expression of alarm.*] There will be bloodshed on both sides, my lord King!

HÅKON.

So be it; none the less shall the deed be avenged.

EARL SKULE.

It shall n o t be!—It c a n n o t be!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Nay, there the Earl is right.

HÅKON.

Say you so, my honoured lord?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Andres Skialdarband has taken the Cross.

HÅKON AND EARL SKULE.

Taken the Cross!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

And has already sailed from the land.

EARL SKULE.

'Tis well for all of us!

HÅKON.

The day wanes; the bridal-feast must now be at an end. I thank you, Sir Earl, for all the honour that has been shown me in these days.—You are bound for Nidaros, as I think?

EARL SKULE.

That is my intent.

HÅKON.

And I for Viken.—If you, Margrete, choose rather to abide in Bergen, then do so.

MARGRETE.

Whither you go, I go, until you forbid.

HÅKON.

Good; then come with me.

SIGRID.

Now is our kindred spread far abroad. [*Kneels to* HÅKON.] Grant me a grace, my lord King.

HÅKON.

Rise, Lady Sigrid; whatever you crave shall be granted.

SIGRID.

I cannot go with the Earl to Nidaros. The nunnery at Rein will soon be consecrated; write to the Archbishop—take order that I be made Abbess.

EARL SKULE.

You, my sister?

HÅKON.

You will enter a nunnery!

SIGRID.

[*Rising.*] Since my wedding-night of blood, when the Baglers came and hewed down my bridegroom, and

many hundreds with him, and fired Nidaros town at all its corners—since then, it has been as though the blood and flames had dulled and deadened my sight for the world around me. But power was given me to catch glimpses of that which other eyes see not—and one thing I see now: a time of great dread hanging over this land!

EARL SKULE.

[*Vehemently.*] She is sick! Heed her not!

SIGRID.

A plenteous harvest is ripening for him that reaps in the darkness. Every woman in Norway will have but one task now—to kneel in church and cloister, and pray both day and night.

HÅKON.

[*Shaken.*] Is it prophecy or soul-sickness that speaks thus?

SIGRID.

Farewell, my brother—we shall meet once more.

EARL SKULE.

[*Involuntarily.*] When?

SIGRID.

[*Softly.*] When you take the crown; in the hour of danger,—when you are fain of me in your direst need.

[*Goes out to the right, with* MARGRETE, LADY RAGNHILD, *and the women.*

HÅKON.

[*After a short pause, draws his sword, and says with quiet determination:*] All the Earl's men shall take the oath of fealty.

EARL SKULE.

[*Vehemently.*] Is this your settled purpose? [*Almost imploringly.*] King Håkon, do not so!

HÅKON.

No Earl's man shall leave Bergen ere he has sworn fealty to the King.

[*Goes out with his Guard. All except the* EARL *and the* BISHOP *follow him.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

He has dealt hardly with you to-day!

[EARL SKULE *is silent, and looks out after the* KING, *as though struck dumb.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*More loudly.*] And mayhap not king-born after all.

EARL SKULE.

[*Turns suddenly, in strong excitement, and seizes the* BISHOP *by the arm.*] Trond the Priest's confession—where is it?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

He sent it to me from England ere he died; I know not by whom—and it never reached me.

EARL SKULE.

But it must be found!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

I doubt not but it may.

EARL SKULE.

And if you find it, you will give it into my hands?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

That I promise.

EARL SKULE.

You swear it by your soul's salvation?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

I swear it by my soul's salvation!

EARL SKULE.

Good; till that time I will work against Håkon, wherever it can be done secretly and unnoted. He must be hindered from growing mightier than I, ere the struggle begins.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

But should it prove that he is in truth king-born—what then?

EARL SKULE.

Then I must try to pray—to pray for humbleness, that I may serve him with all my might, as a faithful chieftain.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

And if he be not the rightful king?

EARL SKULE.

Then shall he give place to me! The kingly title and the kingly throne, host and guard, fleet and tribute, towns and strongholds, all shall be mine!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

He will betake him to Viken——

EARL SKULE.

I will drive him out of Viken!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

He will establish himself in Nidaros.

EARL SKULE

I will storm Nidaros!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

He will shut himself up in Olaf's holy church——

EARL SKULE.

I will force the sanctuary——

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

He will fly to the high altar, and cling to Olaf's shrine——

EARL SKULE.

I will drag him down from the altar, though I drag the shrine along with him——

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

But the crown will still be on his head, Earl Skule!

EARL SKULE.

I will strike off the crown with my sword!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

But if it sits too tight——?

EARL SKULE.

Then, in God's name or Satan's—I will strike off the head along with it! [*Goes out to the right.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Looks out after him, nods slowly, and says:*] Ay—ay —'tis in this mood I like the Earl!

ACT THIRD

A room in the Bishop's Palace at Oslo.[1] *On the right is the entrance door. In the back, a small door, standing open, leads into the Chapel, which is lighted up. A curtained door in the left wall leads into the Bishop's sleeping-room. In front, on the same side, stands a cushioned couch. Opposite, on the right, is a writing-table, with letters, documents, and a lighted lamp.*

At first the room is empty; behind the curtain on the left, the singing of monks is heard. Presently PAUL FLIDA, *in travelling dress, enters from the right, stops by the door, waits, looks around, and then knocks three times with his staff upon the floor.*

SIRA VILIAM.

[*Comes out from the left, and exclaims in a hushed voice.*] Paul Flida! God be praised;—then the Earl is not far off.

PAUL FLIDA.

The ships are already at Hoved-isle; I came on ahead. And how goes it with the Bishop?

SIRA VILIAM.

He is even now receiving the Extreme Unction.

[1] An ancient city close to the present Christiania.

PAUL FLIDA.

Then there is great danger.

SIRA VILIAM.

Master Sigard of Brabant has said that he cannot outlive the night.

PAUL FLIDA.

Then meseems he has summoned us too late.

SIRA VILIAM.

Nay, nay,—he has his full senses and some strength to boot; every moment he asks if the Earl comes not soon.

PAUL FLIDA.

You still call him Earl; know you not that the King has granted him the title of Duke?

SIRA VILIAM.

Ay, ay, we know it; 'tis but old custom. Hist!

[He and PAUL FLIDA *cross themselves and bow their heads. From the Bishop's door issue two acolytes with candles, then two more with censers; then priests bearing chalice, paten, and crucifix, and a church banner; behind them a file of priests and monks; acolytes with candles and censers close the procession, which passes slowly into the chapel. The door is shut behind them.*

PAUL FLIDA.

So now the old lord has made up his account with the world.

SIRA VILIAM.

I can tell him that Duke Skule comes so soon as may be?

PAUL FLIDA.

He comes straight from the wharf up here to the Palace. Farewell! [*Goes.*

[*Several priests, among them* PETER, *with some of the* BISHOP'S *servants, come out from the left with rugs, cushions, and a large brazier.*

SIRA VILIAM.

Why do you this?

A PRIEST.

[*Arranging the couch.*] The Bishop wills to lie out here.

SIRA VILIAM.

But is it prudent?

THE PRIEST.

Master Sigard thinks we may humour him. Here he is.

BISHOP NICHOLAS *enters, supported by* MASTER SIGARD *and a priest. He is in his canonicals, but without crozier and mitre.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Light more candles. [*He is led to a seat upon the couch, near the brazier, and is covered with rugs.*] Viliam! Now have I been granted forgiveness for all my sins! They took them all away with them;—meseems I am so light now.

SIRA VILIAM.

The Duke sends you greeting, my lord; he has already passed Hoved-isle!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

'Tis well, very well. Belike the King, too, will soon be here. I have been a sinful hound in my day, Viliam; I have grievously trespassed against the King. The priests in there averred that all my sins should be forgiven me;—well well, it may be so; but 'tis easy for them to promise; 'tis not against t h e m that I have trespassed. No no; it is safest to have it from the King's own mouth. [*Exclaims impatiently.*] Light, I say! 'tis so dark in here.

SIRA VILIAM.

The candles are lighted——

MASTER SIGARD.

[*Stops him by a sign, and approaches the* BISHOP.] How goes it with you, my lord?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

So-so—so-so; my hands and feet are cold.

MASTER SIGARD.

[*Half aloud, as he moves the brazier nearer.*] Ha—'tis the beginning of the end.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Apprehensively, to* VILIAM.] I have commanded that eight monks shall chant and pray for me in the chapel

to-night. Have an eye to them; there are idle fellows among them.

[SIRA VILIAM *points silently towards the chapel, whence singing is heard, which continues during what follows.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

So much still undone, and to go and leave it all! So much undone, Viliam!

SIRA VILIAM.

My lord, think of heavenly things!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

I have time before me;—till well on in the morning, Master Sigard thinks——

SIRA VILIAM.

My lord, my lord!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Give me mitre and crozier!—'Tis very well for you to say that I should think—— [*A priest brings them.*] So, set the cap there, 'tis too heavy for me; give me the crozier in my hand; there, now am I in my armour. A bishop!—— The Evil One dare not grapple with me now!

SIRA VILIAM.

Desire you aught beside?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

No. Stay—tell me:—Peter, Andres Skialdarband's son,—all speak well of him——

SIRA VILIAM.

In truth, his is a blameless soul.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Peter, you shall watch beside me until the King or the Duke shall come. Leave us, meanwhile, ye others, but be at hand. [*All except* PETER *go out on the right.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*After a short pause.*] Peter!

PETER.

[*Approaches.*] My lord?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Hast ever seen old men die?

PETER.

No.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

They are all afeard; that I dare swear. There on the table lies a large letter with seals to it; give it to me. [PETER *brings the letter.*] 'Tis to your mother.

PETER.

To my mother?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

You must get you northward with it to Halogaland. I have written to her touching a great and weighty matter; tidings have come from your father.

PETER.

He is fighting as a soldier of God in the Holy Land. Should he fall there, he falls on hallowed ground; for there every foot's-breadth of earth is sacred. I commend him to God in all my prayers.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Is Andres Skialdarband dear to you?

PETER.

He is an honourable man; but there lives another man whose greatness my mother, as it were, fostered and nourished me withal.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Hurriedly and eagerly.*] Is that Duke Skule?

PETER.

Ay, the Duke—Skule Bårdsson. My mother knew him in younger days. The Duke must sure be the greatest man in the land!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

There is the letter; get you northward with it forthwith!—Are they not singing in there?

PETER.

They are, my lord!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Eight lusty fellows with throats like trumpets, they must surely help somewhat, methinks.

PETER.

My lord, my lord! Why not pray yourself?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

I have too much still undone, Peter. Life is all too short;—besides, the King will surely forgive me when he comes—— [*Gives a start in pain.*

PETER.

You are suffering?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

I suffer not; but there is a ringing in mine ears, a twinkling and flickering before mine eyes——

PETER.

'Tis the heavenly bells ringing you home, and the twinkling of the altar-lights God's angels have lit for you.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Ay, sure 'tis so;—there is no danger if only they lag not with their prayers in there—— Farewell; set forth at once with the letter.

PETER.

Shall I not first——?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Nay, go; I fear not to be alone.

PETER.

Well met again, then, what time the heavenly bells shall sound for me too. [*Goes out on the right.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

The heavenly bells,—ay, 'tis easy talking when you still have two stout legs to stand upon.—So much undone! But much will live after me, notwithstanding. I promised the Duke by my soul's salvation to give him Trond the Priest's confession if it came into my hand;—'tis well I have not got it. Had he certainty, he would conquer or fall; and then one of the twain would be the mightiest man that ever lived in Norway. No no,—what *I* could not reach none other shall reach. Uncertainty serves best; so long as the Duke is burdened with that, they two will waste each other's strength, wheresoever they may; towns will be burnt, dales will be harried,—neither will gain by the other's loss—[*Terrified.*] Mercy, pity! It is I who bear the guilt—I, who set it all agoing! [*Calming himself.*] Well, well, well! but now the King is coming—'tis he that suffers most—he will forgive me—prayers and masses shall be said; there is no danger;—I am a bishop, and I have never slain any man with mine own hand.—'Tis well that Trond the Priest's confession came not; the saints are with me, they will not tempt me to break my promise. —Who knocks at the door? It must be the Duke!

[*Rubs his hands with glee.*] He will implore me for proofs as to the kinship,—and I have no proofs to give him!

INGA OF VARTEIG *enters; she is dressed in black, with a cloak and hood.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Starts.*] Who is that?

INGA.

A woman from Varteig in Borgasyssel, my honoured lord.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

The King's mother!

INGA.

So was I called once.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Go, go! 'Twas not I counselled Håkon to send you away.

INGA.

What the King does is well done; 'tis not therefor I come.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Wherefore then?

INGA.

Gunnulf, my brother, is come home from England——

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

From England——!

INGA.

He has been away these many years, as you know, and has roamed far and wide; now has he brought home a letter——

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Breathlessly.*] A letter——?

INGA.

From Trond the Priest. 'Tis for you, my lord.
[*Hands it to him.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Ah, truly;—and y o u bring it?

INGA.

It was Trond's wish. I owe him great thanks since the time he fostered Håkon. It was told me that you were sick; therefore I set forth at once; I have come hither on foot——

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

There was no such haste, Inga!

DAGFINN THE PEASANT *enters from the right.*

DAGFINN.

God's peace, my honoured lord!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Comes the King?

DAGFINN.

He is now riding down the Ryen hills, with the Queen and the King-child and a great following.

INGA.

[*Rushes up to* DAGFINN.] The King,—the King! Comes he hither?

DAGFINN.

Inga! You here, much-suffering woman!

INGA.

She is not much-suffering who has so great a son.

DAGFINN.

Now will his hard heart be melted.

INGA.

Not a word to the King of me. Yet, oh, I must see him!—Tell me,—comes he hither?

DAGFINN.

Ay, presently.

INGA.

And it is dark evening. The King will be lighted on his way with torches?

DAGFINN.

Yes.

INGA.

Then will I hide me in a gateway as he goes by;—and then home to Varteig. But first will I into Hallvard's church; the lights are burning there to-night; there will I call down blessings on the King, on my fair son. [*Goes out to the right.*

DAGFINN.

I have fulfilled mine errand; I go to meet the King.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Bear him most loving greeting, good Dagfinn!

DAGFINN.

[*As he goes out to the right.*] *I* would not be Bishop Nicholas to-morrow.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Trond the Priest's confession——! So it has come after all—here I hold it in my hand. [*Muses with a fixed gaze.*] A man should never promise aught by his soul's salvation, when he is as old as I. Had I years before me, I could always wriggle free from such a promise; but this evening, this last evening—no, that were imprudent.—But can I keep it? Is it not to endanger all that I have worked for, my whole life through?—[*Whispering.*] Oh, could I but cheat the Evil One, only this one more time! [*Listens.*] What was t h a t ? [*Calls.*] Viliam, Viliam!

SIRA VILIAM *enters from the right.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

What is it that whistles and howls so grimly?

SIRA VILIAM.

'Tis the storm; it grows fiercer.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

The storm grows fiercer! Ay truly, I will keep my promise! The storm, say you——? Are they singing in there?

SIRA VILIAM.

Yes, my lord.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Bid them bestir themselves, and chiefly brother Aslak; he always makes such scant prayers; he shirks whenever he can; he skips, the hound! [*Strikes the floor with his crozier.*] Go in and say to him 'tis the last night I have left; he shall bestir himself, else will I haunt him from the dead!

SIRA VILIAM.

My lord, shall I not fetch Master Sigard?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Go in, I say! [VILIAM *goes into the chapel.*] It must doubtless be heaven's will that I should reconcile the King and the Duke, since it sends me Trond's letter now. This is a hard thing, Nicholas; to tear down at a single wrench what you have spent your life in building up. But there is no other way; I must e'en do the will of heaven this time.—If I could only read what is written in the letter! But I cannot see a word! Mists drive before my eyes; they sparkle and flicker; and I dare let none other read it for me! To make such a promise——! Is human cunning, then, so poor a thing

that it cannot govern the outcome of its contrivances in the second and third degree? I spoke so long and so earnestly to Vegard Væradal about making the King send Inga from him, that at length it came to pass. That was wise in the first degree; but had I not counselled thus, then Inga had not now been at Varteig, the letter had not come into my hands in time, and I had not had any promise to keep—therefore 'twas unwise in the second degree. Had I yet time before me——! but only the space of one night, and scarce even that. I must, I will live longer! [*Knocks with his crozier; a priest enters from the right.*] Bid Master Sigard come! [*The priest goes; the* BISHOP *crushes the letter in his hands.*] Here, under this thin seal, lies Norway's saga for a hundred years! It lies and dreams, like the birdling in the egg! Oh, that I had more souls than o n e—or else n o n e! [*Presses the letter wildly to his breast.*] Oh, were not the end so close upon me,—and judgment and doom—I would hatch you out into a hawk that should cast the dreadful shadow of his wings over all the land, and strike his sharp talons into every heart! [*With a sudden shudder.*] But the last hour is at hand! [*Shrieking.*] No, no! You shall become a swan, a white swan! [*Throws the letter far from him, on to the floor, and calls:*] Master Sigard, Master Sigard!

MASTER SIGARD.

[*From the right.*] How goes it, honoured lord!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Master Sigard—sell me three days' life!

MASTER SIGARD.

I have told you——

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Yes, yes; but that was in jest; 'twas a little revenge on me. I have been a tedious master to you; therefore you thought to scare me. Fie, that was evil,—nay, nay—'twas no more than I deserved! But, now be good and kind! I will pay you well;—three days' life, Master Sigard, only three days' life!

MASTER SIGARD.

Though I myself were to die in the same hour as you, yet could I not add three days to your span.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

O n e day, then, only o n e day! Let it be light, let the sun shine when my soul sets forth! Listen, Sigard! [*Beckons him over, and drags him down upon the couch.*] I have given well-nigh all my gold and silver to the Church, to have high masses sung for me. I will take it back again; you shall have it all! How now, Sigard, shall we two fool them in there? He-he-he! You will be rich, Sigard, and can depart the country; I shall have time to cast about me a little, and make shift with fewer prayers. Come, Sigard, shall we——! [SIGARD *feels his pulse; the* BISHOP *exclaims anxiously:*] How now, why answer you not?

MASTER SIGARD.

[*Rising.*] I have no time, my lord. I must prepare you a draught that may ease you somewhat at the last.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Nay, wait with that! Wait,—and answer me!

MASTER SIGARD.

I have no time; the draught must be ready within an hour. [*Goes out to the right.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Within an hour! [*Knocks wildly.*] Viliam! Viliam!

[SIRA VILIAM *comes out from the chapel.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Call more to help in there! The eight are not enough!

SIRA VILIAM.

My lord——?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

More to help, I say! Brother Kolbein has lain sick these five weeks,—he cannot have sinned much in that time——

SIRA VILIAM.

He was at shrift yesterday.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Eagerly.*] Ay, he must be good; call him! [VILIAM *goes into the chapel again.*] Within an hour! [*Dries the sweat off his brow.*] Pah—how hot it is here!—The miserable hound—what boots all his learning, when he cannot add an hour to my life? There sits he in his closet day by day, piecing together his cunning wheels and weights and levers; he thinks to fashion a machine that shall go and go and never stop—*perpetuum mobile* he calls it. Why not rather turn his art and his skill

to making man such a *perpetuum mobile?* [*Stops and thinks; his eyes light up.*] *Perpetuum mobile,*—I am not strong in Latin—but it means somewhat that has power to work eternally, through all the ages. If I myself, now, could but——? T h a t were a deed to end my life withal! That were to do my greatest deed in my latest hour! To set wheel and weight and lever at work in the King's soul and the Duke's; to set them a-going so that no power on earth can stop them; if I can but do that, then shall I live indeed, live in my work—and, when I think of it, mayhap 'tis t h a t which is called immortality.—Comfortable, soothing thoughts, how ye do the old man good! [*Draws a deep breath, and stretches himself comfortably upon the couch.*] Diabolus has pressed me hard to-night. That comes of lying idle; *otium est pulvis—pulveris*—pooh, no matter for the Latin—— Diabolus shall no longer have power over me; I will be busy to the last; I will——; how they bellow in yonder—— [*Knocks;* VILIAM *comes out.*] Tell them to hold their peace; they disturb me. The King and the Duke will soon be here; I have weighty matters to ponder.

SIRA VILIAM.

My lord, shall I then——?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Bid them hold awhile, that I may think in peace. Look you, take up yonder letter that lies upon the floor.—Good. Reach me the papers here——

SIRA VILIAM.

[*Goes to the writing-table.*] Which, my lord?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

It matters not——; the sealed ones; those that lie uppermost—So; go now in and bid them be silent. [VILIAM *goes.*] To die, and yet rule in Norway! To die, and yet so contrive things that no man may come to raise his head above the rest. A thousand ways may lead towards that goal; yet can there be but o n e that will reach it;—and now to find that one—to find it and follow it—— Ha! The way lies so close, so close at hand! Ay, so it must be. I will keep my promise; the Duke shall have the letter in his hands;—but the King—he shall have the thorn of doubt in his heart. Håkon is upright, as they call it; many things will go to wreck in his soul along with the faith in himself and in his right. Both of them shall doubt and believe by turns, still swaying to and fro, and finding no firm ground beneath their feet—*perpetuum mobile!*—But will Håkon believe what I say? Ay, that will he; am I not a dying man?—And to prepare the way I will feed him up with truths.—My strength fails, but fresh life fills my soul;—I no longer lie on a sick-bed, I sit in my workroom; I will work the last night through, work—till the light goes out——

DUKE SKULE.

[*Enters from the right and advances towards the* BISHOP.] Peace and greeting, my honoured lord! I hear it goes ill with you.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

I am a corpse in the bud, good Duke; this night shall I break into bloom; to-morrow you may scent my perfume.

DUKE SKULE.

Already to-night, say you?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Master Sigard says within an hour.

DUKE SKULE.

And Trond the Priest's letter——?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Think you still upon that?

DUKE SKULE.

'Tis never out of my thoughts.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

The King has made you Duke; before you, no man in Norway has borne that title.

DUKE SKULE.

'Tis not enough. If Håkon be not the rightful king, then must I have all!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Ha, 'tis cold in here; the blood runs icy through my limbs.

DUKE SKULE.

Trond the Priest's letter, my lord! For Almighty God's sake,—have you it?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

At least, I know where it may be found.

DUKE SKULE.

Tell me then, tell me!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Wait—

DUKE SKULE.

Nay, nay—lose not your time; I see it draws to an end;—and 'tis sad the King comes hither.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Ay, the King comes; thereby you may best see that I am mindful of your cause, even n o w .

DUKE SKULE.

What is your purpose?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Mind you, at the King's bridal—you said that Håkon's strength lay in his steadfast faith in himself?

DUKE SKULE.

Well?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

If I confess, and raise a doubt in his mind, then his faith will fall, and his strength with it.

DUKE SKULE.

My lord, this is sinful, sinful, if he be the rightful king.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

'Twill be in your power to restore his faith. Ere I depart hence, I will tell you where Trond the Priest's letter may be found.

SIRA VILIAM.

[*From the right.*] The King is now coming up the street, with torch-bearers and attendants.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

He shall be welcome. [VILIAM *goes.*] Duke, I beg of you one last service: do you carry on my feuds against all mine enemies. [*Takes out a letter.*] Here I have written them down. Those whose names stand first I would fain have hanged, if it could be so ordered.

DUKE SKULE.

Think not upon vengeance now; you have but little time left——

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Not on vengeance, but on punishment. Promise me to wield the sword of punishment over all mine enemies when I am gone. They are your foemen no less than mine; when you are King you must chastise them; do you promise me that?

DUKE SKULE.

I promise and swear it; but Trond's letter——!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

You shall learn where it is;—but see—the King comes; hide the list of our foemen!

[*The* DUKE *hides the paper; at the same moment* HÅKON *enters from the right.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Well met at the grave-feast, my lord King.

HÅKON.

You have ever withstood me stubbornly; but that shall be forgiven and forgotten now; death wipes out even the heaviest reckoning.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

That lightened my soul! Oh how marvellous is the King's clemency! My lord, what you have done for an old sinner this night shall be tenfold——

HÅKON.

No more of that; but I must tell you that I greatly marvel you should summon me hither to obtain my forgiveness, and yet prepare for me such a meeting as this.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Meeting, my lord?

DUKE SKULE.

'Tis of me the King speaks. Will you, my lord Bishop, assure King Håkon, by my faith and honour,

that I knew nought of his coming, ere I landed at Oslo wharf?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Alas, alas! The blame is all mine! I have been sickly and bedridden all the last year; I have learnt little or nought of the affairs of the kingdom; I thought all was now well between the princely kinsmen!

HÅKON.

I have marked that the friendship between the Duke and myself thrives best when we hold aloof from one another; therefore farewell, Bishop Nicholas, and God be with you where you are now to go.

[*Goes towards the door.*

DUKE SKULE.

[*Softly and uneasily.*] Bishop, Bishop, he is going!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Suddenly and with wild energy.*] Stay, King Håkon!

HÅKON.

[*Stops.*] What now?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

You shall not leave this room until old Bishop Nicholas has spoken his last word!

HÅKON.

[*Instinctively lays his hand upon his sword.*] Mayhap you have come well attended to Viken, Duke.

DUKE SKULE.

I have no part in this.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

'Tis by force of words that I will hold you. Where there is a burial in the house, the dead man ever rules the roost; he can do and let alone as he will—so far as his power may reach. Therefore will I now speak my own funeral-speech; in days gone by, I was ever sore afraid lest King Sverre should come to speak it——

HÅKON.

Talk not so wildly, my lord!

DUKE SKULE.

You shorten the precious hour still left to you!

HÅKON.

Your eyes are already dim!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Ay, my sight is dim; I scarce can see you where you stand; but before my inward eye, my life is moving in a blaze of light. T h e r e I see sights——; hear and learn, O King!—My race was the mightiest in the land; many great chieftains had sprung from it; *I* longed to be the greatest of them all. I was yet but a boy when I began to thirst after great deeds; meseemed I could by no means wait till I were grown. Kings arose who had less right than I,—Magnus Erlingsson, Sverre the Priest——; I also would be king; but I must needs be a chieftain first. Then came the battle at Ilevoldene;

'twas the first time I went out to war. The sun went up, and glittering lightnings flashed from a thousand burnished blades. Magnus and all his men advanced as to a game; I alone felt a tightness at my heart. Fiercely our host swept forward; but I could not follow—I was afraid! All Magnus's other chieftains fought manfully, and many fell in the fight; but I fled up over the mountain, and ran and ran, and stayed not until I came down to the fiord again, far away. Many a man had to wash his bloody clothes in Trondheim-fiord that night;—I had to wash mine too, but not from blood. Ay, King, I was afraid;—born to be a chieftain—and afraid! It fell upon me as a thunderbolt; from that hour I hated all men. I prayed secretly in the churches, I wept and knelt before the altars, I gave rich gifts, made sacred promises; I tried and tried in battle after battle, at Saltösund, at Jonsvoldene that summer the Baglers lay in Bergen,—but ever in vain. Sverre it was who first noted it; he proclaimed it loudly and with mockery, and from that day forth, not a man in the host but laughed when Nicholas Arnesson was seen in war-weed. A coward, a coward—and yet was I filled with longing to be a chief, to be a king; nay, I felt I was born to be King. I could have furthered God's kingdom upon earth; but 'twas the saints themselves that barred the way for me.

HÅKON.

Accuse not Heaven, Bishop Nicholas! You have hated much.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Ay, I have hated much; hated every head in this land that raised itself above the crowd. But I hated

because I could not love. Fair women,—oh, I could devour them even now with glistening eyes! I have lived eighty years, and yet do I yearn to kill men and clasp women;—but my lot in love was as my lot in war: nought but an itching will, my strength sapped from my birth; dowered with seething desire—and yet a weakling! So I became a priest: king or priest must that man be who would have all might in his hands. [*Laughs.*] I a priest! I a churchman! Yes, for one clerkly office Heaven had notably fitted me—for taking the high notes—for singing with a woman's voice at the great church-festivals. And yet they up yonder claim of me—the half-man—what they have a right to claim only of those whom they have in all things fitted for their life-work! There have been times when I fancied such a claim might be just; I have lain here on my sick-bed crushed by the dread of doom and punishment. Now it is over; my soul has fresh marrow in its bones; *I* have not sinned; it is *I* that have suffered wrong; *I* am the accuser!

DUKE SKULE.

[*Softly.*] My lord—the letter! You have little time left.

HÅKON.

Think of your soul, and humble you!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

A man's life-work is his soul, and my life-work still shall live upon the earth. But you, King Håkon, you should beware; for as Heaven has stood against me, and reaped harm for its reward, so are you standing against the man who holds the country's welfare in his hand——

HÅKON.

Ha—Duke, Duke! Now I see the bent of this meeting.

DUKE SKULE.

[*Vehemently, to the* BISHOP.] Not a word more of this!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*To* HÅKON.] He will stand against you so long as his head sits fast on his shoulders. Share with him! I will have no peace in my coffin, I will rise again, if you two share not the kingdom! Neither of you shall add the other's height to his own stature. If that befell, there would be a giant in the land, and here shall no giant be; for I was never a giant!

[*Sinks back exhausted on the couch.*

DUKE SKULE.

[*Falls on his knees beside the couch and cries to* HÅKON.] Summon help! For God's pity's sake; the Bishop must not die yet!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

How it waxes dusk before my eyes!—King, for the last time—will you share with the Duke?

HÅKON.

Not a shred will I let slip of that which God gave me.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Well and good. [*Softly.*] Your faith, at least, you shall let slip. [*Calls.*] Viliam!

DUKE SKULE.

[*Softly.*] The letter! The letter!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Not listening to him.*] Viliam! [VILIAM *enters; the* BISHOP *draws him close down to him and whispers.*] When I received the Extreme Unction, all my sins were forgiven me?

SIRA VILIAM.

All your sins from your birth, till the moment you received the Unction.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

No longer? Not until the very end?

SIRA VILIAM.

You will not sin to-night, my lord!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Who can tell——? Take the golden goblet Bishop Absalon left me—give it to the Church—and say seven high masses more.

SIRA VILIAM.

God will be gracious to you, my lord!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Seven more masses, I say—for sins I may commit to-night! Go, go! [VILIAM *goes; the* BISHOP *turns to* SKULE.] Duke, if you should come to read Trond the Priest's letter, and it should mayhap prove that Håkon is the rightful king—what would you do then?

DUKE SKULE.

In God's name—king he should remain.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Bethink you; much is at stake. Search every fold of your heart; answer as though you stood before your Judge! What will you do, if he be the rightful king?

DUKE SKULE.

Bow my head and serve him.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Mumbles.*] So, so: then bide the issue. [*To* SKULE.] Duke, I am weak and weary; a mild and charitable mood comes over me——

DUKE SKULE.

It is death! Trond the Priest's letter! Where is it?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

First another matter;—I gave you the list of my enemies——

DUKE SKULE.

[*Impatiently.*] Yes, yes; I will take full revenge upon them——

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

No, my soul is filled with mildness; I will forgive, as the Scripture commands. As you would forgo might, I will forgo revenge. Burn the list!

DUKE SKULE.

Ay, ay; as you will.

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

Here, in the brazier; so that I may see it——

DUKE SKULE.

[*Throws the paper into the fire.*] There, then; see, it burns. And now, speak, speak. You risk thousands of lives if you speak not now!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*With sparkling eyes.*] Thousands of lives. [*Shrieks.*] Light! Air!

HÅKON.

[*Rushes to the door and cries.*] Help! The Bishop is dying!

SIRA VILIAM *and several of the* BISHOP'S *men enter.*

DUKE SKULE.

[*Shakes the* BISHOP'S *arm.*] You risk Norway's happiness through hundreds of years, mayhap its greatness to all eternity!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

To all eternity! [*Triumphantly.*] *Perpetuum mobile!*

DUKE SKULE.

By our soul's salvation,—where is Trond the Priest's letter?

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Calls.*] Seven more masses, Viliam!

DUKE SKULE.

[*Beside himself.*] The letter! The letter!

BISHOP NICHOLAS.

[*Smiling in his death-agony.*] 'Twas it you burned, good Duke! [*Falls back on the couch and dies.*

DUKE SKULE.

[*With an involuntary cry, starts backwards and covers his face with his hands.*] Almighty God!

THE MONKS.

[*Rushing in flight from the chapel.*] Save you, all who can!

SOME VOICES.

The powers of evil have broken loose!

OTHER VOICES.

There rang a loud laugh from the corner!—A voice cried: "We have him!"—— All the lights went out!

HÅKON.

Bishop Nicholas is even now dead.

THE MONKS.

[*Fleeing to the right.*] Pater noster—Pater noster.

HÅKON.

[*Approaches* SKULE, *and says in a low voice.*] Duke, I will not question what secret counsel you were hatching with the Bishop ere he died;—but from to-morrow must you give up your powers and dignities into my hands; I see clearly now that we two cannot go forward together.

DUKE SKULE.

[*Looks at him absently.*] Go forward together——?

HÅKON.

To-morrow I hold an Assembly in the Palace; then must all things be made clear between us.

[*Goes out to the right.*

DUKE SKULE.

The Bishop dead and the letter burnt! A life full of doubt and strife and dread! Oh, could I but pray!—No—I must act; this evening must the stride be taken, once for all! [*To* VILIAM.] Whither went the King?

SIRA VILIAM.

[*Terrified.*] Christ save me,—what would you with him?

DUKE SKULE.

Think you I would slay him to-night?

[*Goes out to the right.*

SIRA VILIAM.

[*Looks after him, shaking his head, while the house-folk bear the body out to the left.*] Seven more masses,

the Bishop said; I think 'twere safest we should say fourteen. [*Follows the others.*

A room in the Palace. In the back is the entrance door; in each of the side walls a smaller door; in front, on the right, a window. Hung from the roof, a lamp is burning. Close to the door on the left stands a bench, and further back a cradle, in which the King-child is sleeping; MARGRETE *is kneeling beside the child.*

MARGRETE.

[*Rocks the cradle and sings.*]

Now roof and rafters blend with
The starry vault on high;
Now flieth little Håkon
On dream-wings through the sky.

There mounts a mighty stairway
From earth to God's own land;
There Håkon with the angels
Goes climbing, hand in hand.

God's angel-babes are watching
Thy cot, the still night through;
God bless thee, little Håkon,
Thy mother watcheth too.

A short pause. DUKE SKULE *enters from the back.*

MARGRETE.

[*Starts up with a cry of joy and rushes to meet him.*] My father!—Oh, how I have sighed and yearned for this meeting!

DUKE SKULE.

God's peace be with you, Margrete! Where is the King?

MARGRETE.

With Bishop Nicholas.

DUKE SKULE.

Ha,—then must he soon be here.

MARGRETE.

And you will talk together and be at one, be friends again, as in the old days?

DUKE SKULE.

That would I gladly.

MARGRETE.

'Twould rejoice Håkon no less; and I pray to God every day that so it may be. Oh, but come hither and see—— [*Takes his hand and leads him to the cradle.*

DUKE SKULE.

Your child!

MARGRETE.

Ay, that lovely babe is mine;—is it not marvellous? He is called Håkon, like the King! See, his eyes—nay, you cannot see them now he is sleeping—but he has great blue eyes; and he can laugh, and reach forth his hands to take hold of me,—and he knows me already. [*Smoothes out the bed-clothes tenderly.*

DUKE SKULE.

Håkon will have sons, the Bishop foretold.

MARGRETE.

To me this little child is a thousand times dearer than all Norway's land—and to Håkon too. Meseems I cannot rightly believe my happiness; I have the cradle standing by my bedside; every night, as often as I waken, I look to see if it be there—I am fearful lest it should prove to be all a dream——

DUKE SKULE.

[*Listens and goes to the window.*] Is not that the King?

MARGRETE.

Ay; he is going up the other stair; I will bring him. [*Takes her father's hand and leads him playfully up to the cradle.*] Duke Skule! Keep watch over the King-child the while—for he is a King-child too—though I can never remember it! Should he wake, then bow deeply before him, and hail him as men hail kings! Now will I bring Håkon. Oh, God, God! now at last come light and peace over our house.

[*Goes out to the right.*

DUKE SKULE.

[*After a short and gloomy silence.*] Håkon has a son. His race shall live after him. If he die, he leaves an heir who stands nearer the throne than all others. All things thrive with Håkon. Mayhap he is not the rightful king; but his faith in himself stands firm as ever; the Bishop would have shaken it, but Death gave him

not time, God gave him not leave. God watches over Håkon, and suffers him to keep the girdle of strength. Were I to tell him now? Were I to make oath to what the Bishop told me? What would it avail? None would believe me, neither Håkon nor the others. He would have believed the Bishop in the hour of death; the doubt would have rankled poisonously in him; but it was not to be. And deep-rooted as is Håkon's faith, so is my doubt deep-rooted; what man on earth can weed it out? None, none. The ordeal has been endured, God has spoken, and still Håkon may not be the rightful king, while my life goes to waste. [*Seats himself broodingly beside a table on the right.*] And if, now, I won the kingdom, would not the doubt dwell with me none the less, gnawing and wearing and wasting me away, with its ceaseless icy drip, drip.—Aye; but 'tis better to sit doubting on the throne than to stand down in the crowd, doubting of him who sits there in your stead.—There must be an end between me and Håkon! An end? But how? [*Rises.*] Almighty, thou who hast thus bestead me, thou must bear the guilt of the issue! [*Goes to and fro, stops and reflects.*] I must break down all bridges, hold only o n e, and there conquer or fall —as the Bishop said at the bridal-feast at Bergen. That is now nigh upon three years since, and through all that time have I split up and spilt my strength in trying to guard all the bridges. [*With energy.*] Now must I follow the Bishop's counsel; now or never! Here are we both in Oslo; this time I have more men than Håkon; why not seize the advantage—'tis so seldom on my side. [*Vacillating.*] But to-night——? At once——? No, no! Not to-night! Ha-ha-ha—there again!—pondering, wavering! Håkon knows not what that means; he goes straight forward, and so he con-

quers! [*Going up the room, stops suddenly beside the cradle.*] The King-child!—How fair a brow! He is dreaming. [*Smoothes out the bed-clothes, and looks long at the child.*] Such an one as thou can save many things in a man's soul. I have no son. [*Bends over the cradle.*] He is like Håkon—— [*Shrinks suddenly backwards.*] The King-child, said the Queen! Bow low before him and hail him as men hail kings! Should Håkon die before me, this child will be raised to the throne; and I—I shall stand humbly before him, and bow low and hail him as king! [*In rising agitation.*] This child, Håkon's son, shall sit on high, on the seat that should in right, mayhap, be mine—and I shall stand before his footstool, white-haired and bowed with age, and see my whole life-work lying undone—die without having been king!—I have more men than Håkon—there blows a storm to-night, and the wind sweeps down the fiord——! If I took the King-child? I am safe with the Trönders.[1] What would Håkon dare attempt, were his child in my power? My men will follow me, fight for me and conquer. Their reward shall be kingly, and they know it.—So shall it be! I will take the stride; I will leap the abyss, for the first time! Could I but see if thou hast Sverre's eyes—or Håkon Sverresson's——! He sleeps. I cannot see them. [*A pause.*] Sleep is as a shield. Sleep in peace, thou little Pretender! [*Goes over to the table.*] Håkon shall decide; once again will I speak with him.

MARGRETE.

[*Enters, with the* KING, *from the room on the right.*] The Bishop dead! Oh, trust me, all strife dies with him.

[1] Men of the Trondheim district.

HÅKON.

To bed, Margrete! You must be weary after the journey.

MARGRETE.

Yes, yes. [*To the* DUKE.] Father, be kind and yielding—Håkon has promised to be the like! A thousand good-nights, to both of you!

[*Makes a gesture of farewell at the door on the left, and goes out; two women carry out the cradle.*

DUKE SKULE.

King Håkon, this time we must not part as foes. All evil will follow; there will fall a time of dread upon the land.

HÅKON.

The land has known nought else through many generations; but, see you, God is with me; every foeman falls that would stand against me. There are no more Baglers, no Slittungs, no Ribbungs; Earl Jon is slain, Guthorm Ingesson is dead, Sigurd Ribbung likewise—all claims that were put forth at the folkmote at Bergen have fallen powerless—from whom, then, should the time of dread come now?

DUKE SKULE.

Håkon, I fear me it might come from me!

HÅKON.

When I came to the throne, I gave you the third part of the kingdom——

DUKE SKULE.

But kept two-thirds yourself!

HÅKON.

You ever thirsted after more; I eked out your share until now you hold half the kingdom.

DUKE SKULE.

There lack ten ship-wards.[1]

HÅKON.

I made you Duke; that has no man been in Norway before you.

DUKE SKULE.

But you are king! I must have no king over me! I was not born to serve you; I must rule in my own right!

HÅKON.

[*Looks at him for a moment, and says coldly:*] Heaven guard your understanding, my lord. Good night.

[*Going.*

DUKE SKULE.

[*Blocking the way.*] You shall not go from me thus! Beware, or I will forswear all faith with you; you can no longer be my overlord; we two must share!

HÅKON.

You dare to say this to me!

[1] *Skibreder*, districts each of which furnished a ship to the fleet.

DUKE SKULE.

I have more men than you in Oslo, Håkon Håkonsson.

HÅKON.

Mayhap you think to——

DUKE SKULE.

Hearken to me! Think of the Bishop's words! Let us share; give me the ten ship-wards; let me hold my share as a free kingdom, without tax or tribute. Norway has ere this been parted into two kingdoms;—we will hold firmly together——

HÅKON.

Duke, you must be soul-sick, that you can crave such a thing.

DUKE SKULE.

Ay, I am soul-sick, and there is no other healing for me. We two must be equals; there must be no man over me!

HÅKON.

Every treeless skerry is a stone in the building which Harald Hårfager and the sainted King Olaf reared; would you have me break in twain what they have mortised together? Never!

DUKE SKULE.

Well, then let us reign by turns; let each bear sway for three years! You have reigned long; now my turn has come. Depart from the land for three years;—I

will be king the while; I will even out your paths for you against your home-coming; I will guide all things for the best;—it wears and blunts the senses to sit ever on the watch. Håkon, hear me—three years each; let us wear the crown by turns!

HÅKON.

Think you my crown would fit well on your brow?

DUKE SKULE.

No crown is too wide for m e !

HÅKON.

It needs a God-sent right and a God-sent calling to wear the crown.

DUKE SKULE.

And know you so surely that you have a God-sent right?

HÅKON.

I have God's own word for it.

DUKE SKULE.

Rest not too surely on that. Had the Bishop had time to speak—but that were bootless now; you would not believe me. Ay, truly you have mighty allies on high; but I defy you none the less! You will not reign by turns with me? Well—then must we try the last resort;—Håkon, let us two fight for it, man to man, with heavy weapons, for life or death!

HÅKON.

Speak you in jest, my lord?

DUKE SKULE.

I speak for my life-work and for my soul's salvation!

HÅKON.

Then is there small hope for the saving of your soul.

DUKE SKULE.

You will not fight with me? You shall, you shall!

HÅKON.

Oh blinded man! I cannot but pity you. You think 'tis the Lord's calling that draws you toward the throne; you see not that 'tis nought but pride of heart. What is it that allures you? The royal circlet, the purple-bordered mantle, the right to be seated three steps above the floor;—pitiful, pitiful! Were that kingship, I would cast it into your hat, as I cast a groat to a beggar.

DUKE SKULE.

You have known me since your childhood, and you judge me thus!

HÅKON.

You have wisdom and courage and all noble gifts of the mind; you are born to stand nearest a king, but not to be a king yourself.

DUKE SKULE.

That will we now put to the proof!

HÅKON.

Name me a single king's-task you achieved in all the years you were regent for me! Were the Baglers or the Ribbungs ever mightier than then? You were in ripe manhood, yet the land was harried by rebellious factions; did you quell a single one of them? I was young and untried when I came to the helm—look at me—all fell before me when I became king; there are no Baglers, no Ribbungs left!

DUKE SKULE.

Beware how you boast of that; for t h e r e lies the greatest danger. Party must stand against party, claim against claim, region against region, if the king is to have the might. Every village, every family, must either need him or fear him. If you strike at the root of faction, at the same stroke you kill your own power.

HÅKON.

And you would be king—you, who think such thoughts! You had been well fitted for a chieftain's part in Erling Skakke's days; but the time has grown away from you, and you know it not. See you not, then, that Norway's realm, as Harald and Olaf built it up, may be likened to a church that stands as yet unconsecrate? The walls soar aloft with mighty buttresses, the vaultings have a noble span, the spire points upward, like a fir-tree in the forest; but the life, the throbbing heart, the fresh blood-stream, is lacking to the work; God's living spirit is not breathed into it; it stands unconsecrate.—*I* will bring consecration! Norway has been a k i n g d o m, it shall become a p e o p l e. The Trönder has stood against the man of Viken, the Agdeman against the Hor-

dalander, the Halogalander against the Sogndalesman; all shall be one hereafter, and all shall feel and know that they are one! T h a t is the task which God has laid on my shoulders; t h a t is the work which now lies before the King of Norway. That life-work, Duke, I think you were best to leave untried, for truly it is beyond you.

DUKE SKULE.

[*Impressed.*] To unite——? To unite the Trönders and the men of Viken,—all Norway——? [*Sceptically.*] 'Tis impossible! Norway's saga tells of no such thing!

HÅKON.

For y o u 'tis impossible, for you can but work out the old saga afresh; for me, 'tis as easy as for the falcon to cleave the clouds.

DUKE SKULE.

[*In uneasy agitation.*] To unite the whole people—to awaken it so that it shall know itself o n e ! Whence got you so strange a thought? It runs through me like ice and fire. [*Vehemently.*] It comes from the devil, Håkon; it shall never be carried through while I have strength to buckle on my helm.

HÅKON.

'Tis from God the thought comes to me, and never shall I let it slip while I bear St. Olaf's circlet on my brow!

DUKE SKULE.

Then must St. Olaf's circlet fall from your brow!

HÅKON

Who will make it fall?

DUKE SKULE.

I, if none other.

HÅKON.

You, Skule, will be harmless after to-morrow's Assembly.

DUKE SKULE.

Håkon! Tempt not God! Drive me not out upon the last ledge of the deep!

HÅKON.

[*Points to the door.*] Go, my lord—and be it forgotten that we have spoken with sharp tongues this night.

DUKE SKULE.

[*Looks hard at him for a moment, and says:*] Next time, 'twill be with sharper tongues we speak.

[*Goes to the back.*

HÅKON.

[*After a short pause.*] He threatens! No, no, it cannot come to that. He must, he shall give way and do my will; I have need of that strong arm, that cunning brain.—Whatsoever courage and wisdom and strength there may be in this land, all gifts that God has endowed men withal, are but granted them to my uses. For my service did all noble gifts fall to Duke Skule's share; to defy me is to defy Heaven; 'tis my duty to punish whosoever shall set himself up against Heaven's will—for Heaven has done so much for me.

DAGFINN THE PEASANT.

[*Enters from the back.*] Be on your guard to-night, my lord; the Duke has surely evil in his mind.

HÅKON.

What say you?

DAGFINN.

What may be his drift, I know not; but sure am I that something is brewing.

HÅKON.

Can he think to fall upon us? Impossible, impossible!

DAGFINN.

No, 'tis something else. His ships lie clear for sailing; he has summoned an Assembly on board them.

HÅKON.

You must mistake——! Go, Dagfinn, and bring me sure tidings.

DAGFINN.

Ay ay, trust to me. [*Goes.*

HÅKON.

No,—'tis not to be thought of! The Duke dare not rise against me. God will not suffer it—God, who has hitherto guided all things for me so marvellously. I must have peace now, for 'tis now I must set about my work!—I have done so little yet; but I hear the unerring voice of the Lord calling to me: Thou shalt do a great king's-work in Norway!

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

[*Enters from the back.*] My lord and King!

HÅKON.

Gregorius Jonsson! Come you hither?

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

I offer myself for your service. Thus far have I followed the Duke; but now I dare follow him no further.

HÅKON.

What has befallen?

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

That which no man will believe, when 'tis rumoured through the land.

HÅKON.

Speak, speak!

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

I tremble to hear the sound of my own words; know then—— [*He seizes the* KING'S *arm and whispers.*

HÅKON.

[*Starts backwards with a cry.*] Ha, are you distraught?

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

Would to God I were.

HÅKON.

Unheard of! No, it cannot be true!

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

By Christ's dear blood, so is it!

HÅKON.

Go, go; sound the trumpet-call for my guard; get all my men under arms. [GREGORIUS JONSSON *goes.*

HÅKON.

[*Paces the room once or twice, then goes quickly up to the door of* MARGRETE'S *chamber, knocks at it, takes one or two more turns through the room, then goes again to the door, knocks, and calls.*] Margrete!

[*Goes on pacing up and down.*

MARGRETE.

[*In the doorway, attired for the night, with her hair down; she has a red cloak round her shoulders, holding it close together over her breast.*] Håkon! Is it you?

HÅKON.

Yes, yes; come hither.

MARGRETE.

Oh, but you must not look at me; I was in bed already.

HÅKON.

I have other things to think of.

MARGRETE.

What has befallen.

HÅKON.

Give me a good counsel! I have even now received the worst tidings.

MARGRETE.

[*Alarmed.*] What tidings, Håkon?

HÅKON.

That there are now two kings in Norway.

MARGRETE.

Two kings in Norway!—Håkon, where is my father?

HÅKON.

He has proclaimed himself king on board his ship; now he is sailing to Nidaros to be crowned.

MARGRETE.

Oh God, thou almighty——!

[*Sinks down on the bench, covers her face with her hands and weeps.*]

HÅKON.

Two kings in the land!

MARGRETE.

My husband the one—my father the other!

HÅKON.

[*Pacing restlessly up and down.*] Give me a good counsel, Margrete! Should I cross the country by way

of the Uplands, come first to Nidaros, and prevent the crowning? No, it may not be done; my men are too few; there in the north he is more powerful than I.—Give me counsel; how can I have the Duke slain, ere he come to Nidaros?

MARGRETE.

[*Imploringly, with folded hands.*] Håkon, Håkon!

HÅKON.

Can you not hit upon a good device, I say, to have the Duke slain?

MARGRETE.

[*Sinks down from the bench in agony and remains kneeling.*] Oh, can you so utterly forget that he is my father?

HÅKON.

Your father——; ay, ay, it is true; I had forgotten. [*Raises her up.*] Sit, sit, Margrete; comfort you; do not weep; you have no fault in this. [*Goes over to the window.*] Duke Skule will be worse for me than all other foemen! God, God,—why hast thou stricken me so sorely, when I have in nowise sinned! [*A knock at the door in the back; he starts, listens, and cries:*] Who knocks so late?

INGA'S VOICE.

[*Without.*] One who is a-cold, Håkon!

HÅKON.

[*With a cry.*] My mother!

MARGRETE.

[*Springs up.*] Inga!

HÅKON.

[*Rushes to the door and opens it;* INGA *is sitting on the doorstep.*] My mother! Sitting like a dog outside her son's door! And I ask why God has stricken me!

INGA.

[*Stretches out her arms towards him.*] Håkon, my child! Blessings upon you!

HÅKON.

[*Raising her up.*] Come—come in; here are light and warmth!

INGA.

May I come in to you?

HÅKON.

Never shall we part again.

INGA.

My son—my King—oh, but you are good and loving! I stood in a corner and saw you, as you came from the Bishop's Palace; you looked so sorrowful; I could not part from you thus.

HÅKON.

God be thanked for that! No one, truly, could have come to me more welcome than you! Margrete—my

mother—I have sorely sinned; I have barred my heart against you two, who are so rich in love.

MARGRETE.

[*Falls on his neck.*] Oh, Håkon, my beloved husband; do I stand near you now?

HÅKON.

Ay, near me, near me; not to give me cunning counsels, but to shed light over my path. Come what will, I feel the Lord's strength within me!

DAGFINN THE PEASANT.

[*Enters hastily from the back.*] My lord, my lord! the worst has befallen!

HÅKON.

[*Smiles confidently while he holds* MARGRETE *and* INGA *closely to him.*] I know it; but there is nought to fear, good Dagfinn! If there be two kings in Norway, there is but one in Heaven—and He will set all straight!

ACT FOURTH

The great hall in Oslo Palace. KING SKULE *is feasting with the Guard and his Chiefs. In front, on the left, stands the throne, where* SKULE *sits, richly attired, with a purple mantle and the royal circlet on his head. The supper-table, by which the guests are seated, stretches from the throne towards the background. Opposite to* SKULE *sit* PAUL FLIDA *and* BÅRD BRATTE. *Some of the humbler guests are standing, to the right. It is late evening; the hall is brightly lighted. The banquet is drawing to a close; the men are very merry, and some of them drunk; they drink to each other, laugh, and all talk together.*

PAUL FLIDA.

[*Rises and strikes the table.*] Silence in the hall; Jatgeir Skald will say forth his song in honour of King Skule.

JATGEIR.

[*Stands out in the middle of the floor.*[1]

Duke Skule he summoned the Örething[2]
When 'twas mass-time in Nidaros town;
And the bells rang and swords upon bucklers clashed bravely
When Duke Skule he donned the crown.

[1] The metre of this song is very rugged in the original, and the wording purposely uncouth.

[2] See note, p. 163.

King Skule marched over the Dovrëfjeld,
His host upon snow-shoes sped;
The Gudbranddalesman he grovelled for grace,
But his hoard must e'en ransom his head.

King Skule south over Miösen fared,—
The Uplander cursed at his banner;
King Skule hasted through Raumarike
To Låka in Nannestad manor.

'Twas all in the holy Shrove-tide week
We met with the Birchleg horde;
Earl Knut was their captain—the swords with loud tongue
In the suit for the throne made award.

They say of a truth that since Svërre's days
Was never so hot a fight;
Red-sprent, like warriors' winding-sheets,
Grew the upland that erst lay white.

They took to their heels did the Birchenlegs,
Flinging from them both buckler and bill there;
Many hundreds, though, took to their heels nevermore,
For they lay and were icily chill there.

No man knows where King Håkon hideth;—
King Skule stands safe at the helm.
All hail and long life to thee, lord, in thy state
As King of all Norway's realm!

SKULE'S MEN.

[Spring up with loud jubilation, hold goblets and beakers aloft, clash their weapons, and repeat:

All hail and long life to thee, lord, in thy state
As King of all Norway's realm!

KING SKULE.

Thanks for the song, Jatgeir Skald! 'Tis as I best like it; for it gives my men no less praise than myself.

JATGEIR.

The King is honoured when his men are praised.

KING SKULE.

Take as guerdon this arm-ring, stay with me, and be of my household; I will have many skalds about me.

JATGEIR.

'Twill need many, my lord, if all your great deeds are to be sung.

KING SKULE.

I will be threefold more bountiful than Håkon; the skald's song shall be honoured and rewarded like all other noble deeds, so long as I am king. Be seated; now you belong to my household; all you have need of shall be freely given you.

JATGEIR.

[*Seats himself.*] Ere long there will be a dearth of what I most need, my lord.

KING SKULE.

What mean you?

JATGEIR.

Foes to King Skule, whose flight and fall I can sing.

MANY OF THE MEN.

[*Amid laughter and applause.*] Well said, Icelander!

PAUL FLIDA.

[*To* JATGEIR.] The song was good; but 'tis known there goes a spice of lying to every skaldwork, and yours was not without it.

JATGEIR.

Lying, Sir Marshal?

PAUL FLIDA.

Ay; you say no man knows where King Håkon is hiding; that is not true; we have certain tidings that Håkon is at Nidaros.

KING SKULE.

[*Smiling.*] He has claimed homage for the King-child, and given it the kingly title.

JATGEIR.

That have I heard; but I knew not that any man could give away that which he himself does not possess.

KING SKULE.

'Tis easiest to give what you yourself do not possess.

BÅRD BRATTE.

But it can scarce be easy to beg your way in mid-winter from Bergen to Nidaros.

JATGEIR.

The fortunes of the Birchlegs move in a ring; they began hungry and frozen, and now they end in like case.

PAUL FLIDA.

'Tis rumoured in Bergen that Håkon has forsworn the Church and all that is holy; he heard not mass on New Year's day.

BÅRD BRATTE.

He could plead lawful hindrance, Paul; he stood all day cutting his silver goblets and dishes to pieces—he had naught else wherewith to pay his household.

[*Laughter and loud talk among the guests.*

KING SKULE.

[*Raises his goblet.*] I drink to you, Bård Bratte, and thank you and all my new men. You fought manfully for me at Låka, and bore a great part in the victory.

BÅRD BRATTE.

It was the first time I fought under you, my lord; but I soon felt that 'tis easy to conquer when such a chieftain as you rides at the head of the host. But I would we had not slain so many and chased them so far; for now I fear 'twill be long ere they dare face us again.

KING SKULE.

Wait till the spring: we shall meet them again, never fear. Earl Knut lies with the remnant at Tunsberg rock, and Arnbiörn Jonsson is gathering a force eastward

in Viken; when they deem themselves strong enough, they will soon let us hear from them.

BÅRD BRATTE.

They will never dare to, after the great slaughter at Låka.

KING SKULE.

Then will we lure them forth with cunning.

MANY VOICES.

Ay, ay—do so, lord King!

BÅRD BRATTE.

You have good store of cunning, King Skule. Your foemen have never warning ere you fall upon them, and you are ever there where they least await you.

PAUL FLIDA.

'Tis therefore that the Birchlegs call us Vårbælgs.[1]

KING SKULE.

Others say Vargbælgs; but this I swear, that when next we meet, the Birchlegs shall learn how hard it is to turn such Wolf-skins inside out.

[1] The derivation of this word is doubtful. In the form *Vargbælg* it means Wolf-skin, from Icelandic *Vargr*=a wolf, and *Belgr*=the skin of an animal taken off whole. The more common form, however, is *Varbelg*, which, as P. A. Munch suggests ("Det Norske Folks Historie," iii. 219), may possibly come from *var* (our word "ware"), a covering, and may be an allusion to the falsity and cunning of the faction. What Ibsen understands by the form *Vårbælg* I cannot discover. *Vâr* (Icelandic *Vâr*) means the springtide. The nickname had been applied to a political faction as early as 1190, and was merely revived as a designation for Skule's adherents.

BÅRD BRATTE.

With their good will shall we never meet—'twill be a chase the whole country round.

KING SKULE.

Ay, that it shall be. First we must purge Viken, and make sure of all these eastward parts; then will we get our ships together, and sail round the Naze and up the coast to Nidaros.

BÅRD BRATTE.

And when you come in such wise to Nidaros, I scarce think the monks will deny to move St. Olaf's shrine out to the mote-stead, as they did in the autumn, when we swore allegiance.

KING SKULE.

The shrine s h a l l out; I will bear my kingship in in all ways lawfully.

JATGEIR.

And I promise you to sing a great death-song, when you have slain the Sleeper.

[*An outburst of laughter among the men.*

KING SKULE.

The Sleeper?

JATGEIR.

Know you not, my lord, that King Håkon is called "Håkon the Sleeper," because he sits as though benumbed ever since you came to the throne?

BÅRD BRATTE.

They say he lies ever with his eyes closed. Doubtless he dreams that he is still king.

KING SKULE.

Let him dream; he shall never dream himself back into the kingship.

JATGEIR.

Let his sleep be long and dreamless, then shall I have stuff for songs.

THE MEN.

Ay, ay, do as the skald says!

KING SKULE.

When so many good men counsel as one, the counsel must be good; yet will we not talk now of that matter. But one promise I will make: each of my men shall inherit the weapons and harness, and gold and silver, of whichever one of the enemy he slays; and each man shall succeed to the dignities of him he lays low. He who slays a baron shall himself be a baron; he who slays a thane, shall receive his thaneship; and all they who already hold such dignities and offices, shall be rewarded after other kingly sort.

THE MEN.

[*Spring up in wild delight.*] Hail, hail, King Skule! Lead us against the Birchlegs!

BÅRD BRATTE.

Now are you sure to conquer in all battles.

PAUL FLIDA.

I claim Dagfinn the Peasant for myself; he owns a good sword that I have long hankered after.

BÅRD BRATTE.

I will have Bård Torsteinsson's hauberk; it saved his life at Låka, for it withstands both cut and thrust.

JATGEIR.

Nay, but let me have it; 'twill fit me better; you shall have five golden marks in exchange.

BÅRD BRATTE.

Where will you find five golden marks, Skald?

JATGEIR.

I will take them from Gregorius Jonsson when we come northward.

THE MEN.

[*All talking together.*] And I will have—I will have—— [*The rest becomes indistinct in the hubbub.*

PAUL FLIDA.

Away! Every man to his quarters; bethink you that you are in the King's hall.

THE MEN.

Ay, ay,—hail to the King, hail to King Skule!

KING SKULE.

To bed now, good fellows! We have sat long over the drinking-table to-night.

A MAN-AT-ARMS.

[*As the crowd is trooping out.*] To-morrow we will cast lots for the Birchlegs' goods.

ANOTHER.

Rather leave it to luck!

SEVERAL.

Nay, nay!

OTHERS.

Ay, ay!

BÅRD BRATTE.

Now the Wolf-skins are fighting for the bear-fell.

PAUL FLIDA.

And they have yet to fell the bear.

[*All go out by the back.*

KING SKULE.

[*Waits till the men are gone; the tension of his features relaxes; he sinks upon a bench.*] How weary I am, weary to death. To live in the midst of that swarm day out and day in, to look smilingly ahead as though I were so immovably assured of right and victory and fortune. To have no creature with whom I may speak of all that gnaws me so sorely. [*Rises with a look of terror.*] And the battle at Låka! That I should have conquered there! Håkon sent his host against me; God was to judge and award between the two kings—and I conquered, conquered, as never any before has conquered the Birchlegs! Their shields stood upright

in the snow, but there was none behind them—the Birchlegs took to the woods, and fled over upland and moor and lea as far as their legs would carry them. The unbelievable came to pass; Håkon lost and I won. There is a secret horror in that victory. Thou great God of Heaven! there rules, then, no certain law on high, that all things must obey? The right carries with it no conquering might? [*With a change of tone, wildly.*] I am sick, I am sick! — Wherefore should not the right be on my side? May I not deem that God himself would assure me of it, since he let me conquer? [*Brooding.*] The possibilities are even; — not a feather-weight more on the one side than on the other; and yet—[*shakes his head*]—yet the balance dips on Håkon's part. I have hatred and hot desire to cast into my scale, yet the balance dips on Håkon's part. When the thought of the kingly right comes over me unawares, 'tis ever he, not I, that is the true king. When I would see myself as the true king, I must do it with forethought, I must build up a whole fabric of subtleties, a work of cunning; I must hold memories aloof, and take faith by storm. It was not so before. What has befallen to fill me so full of doubt? The burning of the letter? No—that made the uncertainty eternal, but did not add to it. Has Håkon done any great and kingly deed in these later days? No, his greatest deeds were done while I least believed in him. [*Seats himself on the right.*] What i s it? Ha, strange! It comes and goes like a marsh-fire; it dances at the tip of my tongue, as when one has lost a word and cannot find it. [*Springs up.*] Ha! Now I have it! No——! Yes, yes! Now I have it!—"Norway has been a k i n g d o m, it shall become a p e o p l e; all shall be one, and all shall feel and know that they are one!" Since Håkon

spoke those madman's words, he stands ever before me as the rightful king. [*Whispers with fixed and apprehensive gaze.*] What if God's calling glimmered through these strange words? If God had garnered up the thought till now, and would now strew it forth—and had chosen Håkon for his sower?

PAUL FLIDA.

[*Enters from the back.*] My lord King, I have tidings for you.

KING SKULE.

Tidings?

PAUL FLIDA.

A man who comes from down the fiord brings news that the Birchlegs in Tunsberg have launched their ships, and that many men have gathered in the town in these last days.

KING SKULE.

Good, we will go forth to meet them—to-morrow or the day after.

PAUL FLIDA.

It might chance, my lord King, that the Birchlegs had a mind to meet us first.

KING SKULE.

They have not ships enough for that, nor men.

PAUL FLIDA.

But Arnbiörn Jonsson is gathering both men and ships, all round in Viken.

KING SKULE.

The better for us; we will crush them at one blow, as we did at Låka.

PAUL FLIDA.

My lord, 'tis not so easy to crush the Birchlegs twice following.

KING SKULE.

And wherefore not?

PAUL FLIDA.

Because Norway's saga tells not that the like has ever befallen. Shall I send forth scouts to Hoved-isle?

KING SKULE.

'Tis needless; the night is dark, and there is a sea-fog to boot.

PAUL FLIDA.

Well well, the King knows best; but bethink you, my lord, that all men are against you here in Viken. The townsfolk of Oslo hate you, and should the Birchlegs come, they will make common cause with them.

KING SKULE.

[*With animation.*] Paul Flida, were it not possible that I could win over the men of Viken to my side?

PAUL FLIDA.

[*Looks at him in astonishment, and shakes his head.*] No, my lord, it is not possible.

KING SKULE.

And wherefore not?

PAUL FLIDA.

Why, for that you have the Trönders on your side.

KING SKULE.

I will have both the Trönders and the men of Viken!

PAUL FLIDA.

Nay, my lord, that cannot be!

KING SKULE.

Not possible! cannot be! And wherefore—wherefore not?

PAUL FLIDA.

Because the man of Viken is the man of Viken, the Trönder is the Trönder; because so it has always been, and no saga tells of a time when it was otherwise.

KING SKULE.

Ay, ay—you are right. Go.

PAUL FLIDA.

And send forth no scouts?

KING SKULE.

Wait till daybreak. [PAUL FLIDA *goes.*] Norway's saga tells of no such thing; it has never been so yet; Paul Flida answers me as I answered Håkon. Are

there, then, upward as well as downward steps? Stands Håkon as high over me as I over Paul Flida? Has Håkon an eye for unborn thoughts, that is lacking in me? Who stood so high as Harold Hårfager in the days when every headland had its king, and he said: Now they must fall—hereafter shall there be but one? He threw the old saga to the winds, and made a new saga. [*A pause; he paces up and down lost in thought; then he stops.*] Can one man take God's calling from another, as he takes weapons and gold from his fallen foe? Can a Pretender clothe himself in a king's life-task, as he can put on the kingly mantle? The oak that is felled to be a ship's timber, can it say: Nay, I will be the mast, I will take on me the task of the fir-tree, point upwards, tall and shining, bear the golden vane at my top, spread bellying white sails to the sunshine, and meet the eyes of all men, from afar!—No, no, thou heavy gnarled oak-trunk, thy place is down in the keel; t h e r e shalt thou lie, and do thy work, unheard-of and unseen by those aloft in the daylight; it is thou that shalt hinder the ship from being whelmed in the storm; while the mast with the golden vane and the bellying sail shall bear it forward toward the new, toward the unknown, toward alien strands and the saga of the future! [*Vehemently.*] Since Håkon uttered his great king-thought, I can see no other thought in the world but that only. If I cannot take it and act it out, I see no other thought to fight for. [*Brooding.*] And can I not make it mine? If I cannot, whence comes my great love for Håkon's thought?

JATGEIR.

[*Enters from the back.*] Forgive my coming, lord King——

KING SKULE.

You come to my wish, Skald!

JATGEIR.

I overheard some townsfolk at my lodging talking darkly of——

KING SKULE.

Let that wait. Tell me, Skald: you who have fared far abroad in strange lands, have you ever seen a woman love another's child? Not only have kindness for it—'tis not that I mean; but l o v e it, love it with the warmest passion of her soul.

JATGEIR.

That do only those women who have no child of their own to love.

KING SKULE.

Only those women——?

JATGEIR.

And chiefly women who are barren.

KING SKULE.

Chiefly the barren——? They love the children of others with all their warmest passions?

JATGEIR.

That will oftentimes befall.

KING SKULE.

And does it not sometimes befall that such a barren woman will slay another's child, because she herself has none?

JATGEIR.

Ay, ay; but in that she does unwisely.

KING SKULE.

Unwisely?

JATGEIR.

Ay, for she gives the gift of sorrow to her whose child she slays.

KING SKULE.

Think you the gift of sorrow is a great good?

JATGEIR.

Yes, lord.

KING SKULE.

[*Looks fixedly at him.*] Methinks there are two men in you, Icelander. When you sit amid the household at the merry feast, you draw cloak and hood over all your thoughts; when one is alone with you, sometimes you seem to be of those among whom one were fain to choose his friend. How comes it?

JATGEIR.

When you go to swim in the river, my lord, you would scarce strip you where the people pass by to church; you seek a sheltered privacy.

KING SKULE.

True, true.

JATGEIR.

My soul has the like shamefastness; therefore I do not strip me when there are many in the hall.

KING SKULE.

Ha. [*A short pause.*] Tell me, Jatgeir, how come you to be a skald? Who taught you skaldcraft?

JATGEIR.

Skaldcraft cannot be taught, my lord.

KING SKULE.

Cannot be taught? How came it then?

JATGEIR.

The gift of sorrow came to me, and I was a skald.

KING SKULE.

Then 'tis the gift of sorrow the skald has need of?

JATGEIR.

I needed sorrow; others there may be who need faith, or joy—or doubt——

KING SKULE.

Doubt as well?

JATGEIR.

Ay; but then must the doubter be strong and sound.

KING SKULE.

And whom call you the unsound doubter?

JATGEIR.

He who doubts of his own doubt.

KING SKULE.

[*Slowly.*] That, methinks, were death.

JATGEIR.

'Tis worse; 'tis neither day nor night.

KING SKULE.

[*Quickly, as if shaking off his thoughts.*] Where are my weapons? I will fight and act—not think. What was it you would have told me when you came?

JATGEIR.

'Twas what I noted in my lodging. The townsmen whisper together secretly, and laugh mockingly, and ask if we be well assured that King Hakon is in the west-land; there is somewhat they are in glee over.

KING SKULE.

They are men of Viken, and therefore against me.

JATGEIR.

They scoff because King Olaf's shrine could not be brought out to the mote-stead when you were chosen king; they say it boded ill.

KING SKULE.

When next I come to Nidaros, the shrine s h a l l out! It shall stand under the open sky, though I should have to tear down St. Olaf's church and widen out the mote-stead over the spot where it stood.

JATGEIR.

That were a strong deed; but I shall make a song of it, as strong as the deed itself.

KING SKULE.

Have you many unmade songs within you, Jatgeir?

JATGEIR.

Nay, but many unborn; they are conceived one after the other, come to life, and are brought forth.

KING SKULE.

And if I, who am King and have the might, if I were to have you slain, would all the unborn skald-thoughts you bear within you die along with you?

JATGEIR.

My lord, it is a great sin to slay a fair thought.

KING SKULE.

I ask not if it be a s i n; I ask if it be p o s s i b l e!

JATGEIR.

I know not.

KING SKULE.

Have you never had another skald for your friend, and has he never unfolded to you a great and noble song he thought to make?

JATGEIR.

Yes, lord.

KING SKULE.

Did you not then wish that you could slay him, to take his thought and make the song yourself?

JATGEIR.

My lord, I am not barren; I have children of my own; I need not to love those of other men. [*Goes.*

KING SKULE.

[*After a pause.*] The Icelander is in very deed a skald. He speaks God's deepest truth and knows it not—— *I* am as a barren woman. Therefore I love Håkon's kingly thought-child, love it with the warmest passion of my soul. Oh, that I could but adopt[1] it! It would die in my hands. Which were best, that it should die in my hands, or wax great in his? Should I ever have peace of soul if that came to pass? Can I forego all? Can I stand by and see Hakon make himself famous for all time! How dead and empty is all within me—and around me. No friend—; ah, the Icelander! [*Goes to the door and calls:*] Has the skald gone from the palace?

A GUARD.

[*Outside.*] No, my lord; he stands in the outer hall talking with the watch.

[1] *Knæsætte*, see note, p. 37.

KING SKULE.

Bid him come hither. [*Goes forward to the table; presently* JATGEIR *enters.*] I cannot sleep, Jatgeir; 'tis all my great kingly thoughts that keep me awake, you see.

JATGEIR.

'Tis with the king's thoughts as with the skald's, I doubt not. They fly highest and grow quickest when there is night and stillness around.

KING SKULE.

Is it so with the skald's thoughts too?

JATGEIR.

Ay, lord; no song is born by daylight; it may be written down in the sunshine; but it makes itself in the silent night.

KING SKULE.

Who gave you the gift of sorrow, Jatgeir?

JATGEIR.

She whom I loved.

KING SKULE.

She died, then.

JATGEIR.

No, she deceived me.

KING SKULE.

And then you became a skald?

JATGEIR.

Ay, then I became a skald.

KING SKULE.

[*Seizes him by the arm.*] What gift do *I* need to become a king?

JATGEIR.

Not the gift of doubt; else would you not question so.

KING SKULE.

What gift do I need?

JATGEIR.

My lord, you a r e a king.

KING SKULE.

Have y o u at all times full faith that you are a skald?

JATGEIR.

[*Looks silently at him for a while, and asks.*] Have you never loved?

KING SKULE.

Yes, once—burningly, blissfully, and in sin.

JATGEIR.

You have a wife.

KING SKULE.

Her I took to bear me sons.

JATGEIR.

But you have a daughter, my lord—a gracious and noble daughter.

KING SKULE.

Were my daughter a son, I would not ask you what gift I need. [*Vehemently.*] I must have some one by me who sinks his own will utterly in mine—who believes in me unflinchingly, who will cling close to me in good hap and ill, who lives only to shed light and warmth over my life, and must die if I fall. Give me counsel, Jatgeir Skald!

JATGEIR.

Buy yourself a dog, my lord.

KING SKULE.

Would no man suffice?

JATGEIR.

You would have to search long for such a man.

KING SKULE.

[*Suddenly.*] Will y o u be that man to me, Jatgeir? Will y o u be a son to me? You shall have Norway's crown to your heritage—the whole land shall be yours, if you will be a son to me, and live for my life-work, and believe in me.

JATGEIR.

And what should be my warranty that I did not feign——?

KING SKULE.

Give up your calling in life; sing no more songs, and then will I believe you!

JATGEIR.

No, lord—that were to buy the crown too dear.

KING SKULE.

Bethink you well—'tis greater to be a king than a skald.

JATGEIR.

Not always.

KING SKULE.

'Tis but your unsung songs you must sacrifice!

JATGEIR.

Songs unsung are ever the fairest.

KING SKULE.

But I must—I m u s t have one who can trust in me! Only one! I feel it—had I that one, I were saved!

JATGEIR.

Trust in yourself and you will be saved!

PAUL FLIDA.

[*Enters hastily.*] King Skule, look to yourself! Håkon Håkonsson lies off Elgjarness with all his fleet!

KING SKULE.

Off Elgjarness——! Then he is close at hand.

JATGEIR.

Get we to arms then! If there be bloodshed to-night, I will gladly be the first to die for you!

KING SKULE.

Y o u , who would not live for me!

JATGEIR.

A man can die for another's life-work; but if he go on living, he must live for his own. [*Goes.*

PAUL FLIDA.

[*Impatiently.*] Your commands, my lord! The Birchlegs may be in Oslo this very hour.

KING SKULE.

'Twere best if we could fare to St. Thomas Beckett's grave; he has helped so many a sorrowful and penitent soul.

PAUL FLIDA.

[*More forcibly.*] My lord, speak not so wildly now; I tell you, the Birchlegs are upon us!

KING SKULE.

Let all the churches be opened, that we may betake us thither and find grace.

PAUL FLIDA.

You can crush all your foemen at one stroke, and yet would betake you to the churches!

KING SKULE.

Yes, yes, keep all the churches open!

PAUL FLIDA.

Be sure Håkon will break sanctuary, when 'tis Vårbælgs he pursues.

KING SKULE.

That will he not; God will shield him from such a sin;—God always shields Håkon.

PAUL FLIDA.

[*In deep and sorrowful wrath.*] To hear you speak thus, a man could not but ask: Who is king in this land?

KING SKULE.

[*Smiling mournfully.*] Ay, Paul Flida, that is the great question: W h o is king in this land?

PAUL FLIDA.

[*Imploringly.*] You are soul-sick to-night, my lord; let me act for you.

KING SKULE.

Ay, ay, do so.

PAUL FLIDA.

[*Going.*] First will I break down all the bridges.

KING SKULE.

Madman! Stay!—Break down all the bridges! Know you what that means? *I* have assayed it;—beware of that!

PAUL FLIDA.

What would you then, my lord?

KING SKULE.

I will talk with Håkon.

PAUL FLIDA.

He will answer you with a tongue of steel.

KING SKULE.

Go, go;—you shall learn my will anon.

PAUL FLIDA.

Every moment is precious! [*Seizes his hand.*] King Skule, let us break down all the bridges, fight like Wolves,[1] and trust in Heaven!

KING SKULE.

[*Softly.*] Heaven trusts not in me; I dare not trust in Heaven.

PAUL FLIDA.

Short has been the saga of the Vårbælgs.

[*Goes out by the back.*

KING SKULE.

A hundred cunning heads, a thousand mighty arms, are at my beck; but not a single loving, trusting heart. That is kingly beggary; no more, no less.

[1] *Varger*, the first part of the word *Vårbælg*.

BÅRD BRATTE.

[*From the back.*] Two wayfarers from afar stand without, praying to have speech with you my lord.

KING SKULE.

Who are they?

BÅRD BRATTE.

A woman and a priest.

KING SKULE.

Let the woman and the priest approach.

[BÅRD *goes;* KING SKULE *seats himself, musing, on the right; presently there enters a black-robed woman; she wears a long cloak, a hood, and a thick veil, which conceals her face; a priest follows her, and remains standing by the door.*

KING SKULE.

Who are you?

THE WOMAN.

One you have loved.

KING SKULE.

[*Shaking his head.*] There lives no one who remembers that I have loved. Who are you, I ask?

THE WOMAN.

One who loves you.

KING SKULE.

Then are you surely one of the dead.

THE WOMAN.

[*Comes close to him and says softly and passionately.*] Skule Bårdsson!

KING SKULE.

[*Rises with a cry.*] Ingeborg!

INGEBORG.

Do you know me now, Skule?

KING SKULE.

Ingeborg,—Ingeborg!

INGEBORG.

Oh, let me look at you—look long at you, so long! [*Seizes his hands; a pause.*] You fair, you deeply loved, you faithless man!

KING SKULE.

Take off that veil; look at me with the eyes that once were as clear and blue as the sky.

INGEBORG.

These eyes have been but a rain-clouded sky for twenty years; you would not know them again, and you shall never see them more.

KING SKULE.

But your voice is fresh and soft and young as ever!

INGEBORG.

I have used it only to whisper y o u r name, to imprint your greatness in a young heart, and to pray to

the sinners' God for grace toward us twain, who have loved in sin.

KING SKULE.

You have done that?

INGEBORG.

I have been silent save to speak loving words of you;—therefore has my voice remained fresh and soft and young.

KING SKULE.

There lies a life-time between. Every fair memory from those days have I wasted and let slip——

INGEBORG.

It was your right.

KING SKULE.

And meantime y o u, Ingeborg, loving, faithful woman, have dwelt there in the north, guarding and treasuring your memories, in ice-cold loneliness!

INGEBORG.

It was my happiness.

KING SKULE.

And I could give you up to win might and riches! With you at my side, as my wife, I had found it easier to be a king.

INGEBORG.

God has been good to me in willing it otherwise. A soul like mine had need of a great sin, to arouse it to remorse and expiation.

KING SKULE.

And now you come——?

INGEBORG.

As Andres Skialdarband's widow.

KING SKULE.

Your husband is dead!

INGEBORG.

On the way from Jerusalem.

KING SKULE.

Then has he atoned for the slaying of Vegard.

INGEBORG.

'Twas not therefore that my noble husband took the Cross.

KING SKULE.

Not therefore?

INGEBORG.

No; it was m y sin he took upon his strong, loving shoulders; 'twas t h a t he went to wash away in Jordan stream; 'twas for t h a t he bled.

KING SKULE.

[*Softly.*] Then he knew all.

INGEBORG.

From the first. And Bishop Nicholas knew it, for to him I confessed. And there was one other man that came to know it, though how I cannot guess.

KING SKULE.

Who?

INGEBORG.

Vegard Væradal.

KING SKULE.

Vegard!

INGEBORG.

He whispered a mocking word of me into my husband's ear; and thereupon Andres Skialdarband drew his sword, and slew him on the spot.

KING SKULE.

He kept ward over her whom *I* betrayed and forgot.
—And wherefore seek you me now?

INGEBORG.

To bring you the last sacrifice.

KING SKULE.

What mean you?

INGEBORG.

[*Points to the Priest who stands by the door.*] Look at him!—Peter, my son, come hither!

KING SKULE.

Your son——!

INGEBORG.

And y o u r s, King Skule!

KING SKULE.

[*Half bewildered.*] Ingeborg!

[PETER *approaches in silent emotion, and throws himself before* KING SKULE.

INGEBORG.

Take him! For twenty years has he been the light and comfort of my life.—Now are you King of Norway; the King's son must enter on his heritage; I have no longer any right to him.

KING SKULE.

[*Raises him up, in a storm of joy.*] Here, to my heart, you whom I have yearned for so burningly! [*Presses him in his arms, lets him go, looks at him, and embraces him again.*] My son! My son! I have a son! Ha-ha-ha! who can stand against me now? [*Goes over to* INGEBORG *and seizes her hand.*] And you, you give him to me, Ingeborg! You take not back your word? You give him to me indeed?

INGEBORG.

Heavy is the sacrifice, and scarce had I strength to make it, but that Bishop Nicholas sent him to me, bearing a letter with tidings of Andres Skialdarband's death. 'Twas the Bishop that laid on me the heavy sacrifice, to atone for all my sin.

KING SKULE.

Then is the sin blotted out, and henceforth he is mine alone; is it not so, mine alone?

INGEBORG.

Yes; but one promise I crave of you.

KING SKULE.

Heaven and earth, crave all you will!

INGEBORG.

He is pure as a lamb of God, as I now give him into your hands. 'Tis a perilous path that leads up to the throne; let him not take hurt to his soul. Hear you, King Skule: let not my child take hurt to his soul!

KING SKULE.

That I promise and swear to you!

INGEBORG.

[*Seizes his arm.*] From the moment you mark that his soul suffers harm, let him rather die!

KING SKULE.

Rather die! I promise and swear it!

INGEBORG.

Then shall I be of good cheer as I go back to Halogaland.

KING SKULE.

Ay, you may be of good cheer.

INGEBORG.

There will I repent and pray, till the Lord calls me. And when we meet before God, he shall come back to me pure and blameless.

KING SKULE.

Pure and blameless! [*Turning to* PETER.] Let me look at you! Ay, your mother's features and mine; you are he for whom I have longed so sorely.

PETER.

My father, my great, noble father! Let me live and fight for you! Let your cause be mine; and be your cause what it may—I know that I am fighting for the right!

KING SKULE.

[*With a cry of joy.*] You trust in me! You trust in me!

PETER.

Immovably!

KING SKULE.

Then all is well; then am I surely saved! Listen: you shall cast off the cowl; the Archbishop shall loose you from your vows; the King's son shall wield the sword, shall go forward unwavering to might and honour.

PETER.

Together with you, my noble father! We will go together!

KING SKULE.

[*Drawing the youth close up to himself.*] Ay, together, we two alone!

INGEBORG.

[*To herself.*] To love, to sacrifice all and be forgotten, that is my saga.[1] [*Goes quietly out by the back.*

[1] As to the earlier text of this scene, see Brandes' *Ibsen and Björnson* (Heinemann, 1899), p. 29.

KING SKULE.

Now shall a great king's-work be done in Norway! Listen, Peter, my son! We will awaken the whole people, and gather it into one; the man of Viken and the Trönder, the Halogalander and the Agdeman, the Uplander and the Sogndaleman, all shall be o n e great family! Then shall you see how the land will come to flourish!

PETER.

What a great and dizzy thought——

KING SKULE.

Do you grasp it?

PETER.

Yes—yes!—Clearly——!

KING SKULE

And have you faith in it?

PETER.

Yes, yes; for I have faith in you!

KING SKULE.

[*Wildly.*] Håkon Håkonsson must die.

PETER.

If you will it, then it is right that he die.

KING SKULE.

'Twill cost blood; but that we cannot heed!

PETER.

The blood is not wasted that flows in your cause.

KING SKULE.

All the might shall be yours when I have built up the kingdom. You shall sit on the throne with the circlet on your brow, with the purple mantle flowing wide over your shoulders; all men in the land shall bow before you—— [*The sounds of distant horns*[1] *are heard.*] Ha! what was that? [*With a cry.*] The Birchleg host! What was it Paul Flida said——?

[*Rushes towards the back.*

PAUL FLIDA.

[*Enters and cries.*] The hour is upon us, King Skule!

KING SKULE.

[*Bewildered.*] The Birchlegs! King Håkon's host! Where are they?

PAUL FLIDA.

They are swarming in thousands down over the Ekeberg.

KING SKULE.

Sound the call to arms! Sound, sound! Give counsel; where shall we meet them?

PAUL FLIDA.

All the churches stand open for us.

[1] *Lur*, the long wooden horn still used among the mountains in Norway.

KING SKULE.

'Tis of the Birchlegs I ask——?

PAUL FLIDA.

For them all the bridges stand open.

KING SKULE.

Unhappy man, what have you done!

PAUL FLIDA.

Obeyed my King!

KING SKULE.

My son! My son! Woe is me; I have lost your kingdom!

PETER.

No, you will conquer! So great a king's-thought cannot die!

KING SKULE.

Peace, peace! [*Horns and shouts are heard, nearer at hand.*] To horse! To arms! More is here at stake than the life and death of men!

[*Rushes out by the back; the others follow him.*

A street in Oslo. On each side, low wooden houses, with porches. At the back, St. Hallvard's churchyard, enclosed by a high wall with a gate. On the left, at the end of the wall, is seen the church, the chief portal of which stands open. It is still night; after a little, the day begins to dawn. The alarm-bell is ringing: far away on the right are heard battle-shouts and confused noises.

KING SKULE'S HORNBLOWER.

[*Enters from the right, blows his horn, and shouts.*] To arms! To arms, all King Skule's men!

[*Blows his horn again, and proceeds on his way; presently he is heard blowing and shouting in the next street.*

A WOMAN.

[*Appears at a house door on the right.*] Great God of mercy, what is astir?

A TOWNSMAN.

[*Who has come out, half dressed, from a house on the other side of the street.*] The Birchlegs are in the town! Now will Skule have his reward for all his misdeeds.

ONE OF SKULE'S MEN.

[*Enters with some others, bearing their cloaks and weapons on their arms, from a side street on the left.*] Where are the Birchlegs?

ANOTHER OF SKULE'S MEN.

[*Coming from a house on the right.*] I know not!

THE FIRST.

Hist! Listen!—They must be down at the Geite-bridge!

THE SECOND.

Off to the Geite-bridge then!

[*They all rush out to the right; a townsman comes running in from the same side.*

THE FIRST TOWNSMAN.

Hey, neighbour, whence come you?

THE SECOND TOWNSMAN.

From down at the Lo-river; there's ugly work there.

THE WOMAN.

St. Olaf and St. Hallvard! Is it the Birchlegs, or who is it?

THE SECOND TOWNSMAN.

Who else but the Birchlegs! King Håkon is with them; the whole fleet is laying in to the wharves; but he himself landed with his best men out at Ekeberg.

THE FIRST TOWNSMAN.

Then will he take revenge for the slaughter at Låka!

THE SECOND TOWNSMAN.

Ay, be sure of that.

THE FIRST TOWNSMAN.

See, see! The Vårbælgs are flying already!

A troop of SKULE'S *men enter in full flight, from the right.*

ONE OF THEM.

Into the church! None can stand against the Birchlegs as they lay about them to-night.

[*The troop rushes into the church and bars the door on the inside.*

THE SECOND TOWNSMAN.

[*Looking out to the right.*] I see a standard far down the street; it must be King Håkon's.

THE FIRST TOWNSMAN.

See, see, how the Vårbælgs are running!

A second troop enters from the right.

ONE OF THE FUGITIVES.

Let us take to the church and pray for grace.
[*They rush at the door.*

SEVERAL VÅRBÆLGS.

'Tis barred! 'tis barred!

THE FIRST.

Up over Martestokke then!

ANOTHER.

Where is King Skule?

THE FIRST.

I know not. Away! yonder I see the Birchlegs' standard! [*They flee past the church, out to the left.*

HÅKON *enters from the right with his Standard-bearer,* GREGORIUS JONSSON, DAGFINN THE PEASANT, *and several other men.*

DAGFINN.

Hark to the war-cry! Skule is gathering his men behind the churchyard.

AN OLD TOWNSMAN.

[*Calls from his porch, to* HÅKON.] Take heed for yourself, dear my lord; the Vårbælgs are fierce, now they are fighting for life.

HÅKON.

Is it you, old Guthorm Erlendsson? You have fought both for my father and for my grandfather.

THE TOWNSMAN.

Would to God I could fight for you as well.

HÅKON.

For that you are too old, and there is no need; men pour in upon me from all sides.

DAGFINN.

[*Pointing off over the wall to the right.*] There comes the Duke's standard!

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

The Duke himself! He rides his white war-horse.

DAGFINN.

We must hinder his passage through the gate here!

HÅKON.

Wind the horn, wind the horn! [*The Hornblower does so.*] You blew better, you whelp, when you blew for money on Bergen wharf.

[*The Hornblower winds another blast, louder than the first; many men come rushing in.*

A VÅRBÆLG.

[*From the right, fleeing towards the church, pursued by a Birchleg.*] Spare my life! Spare my life!

THE BIRCHLEG.

Not though you sat on the altar! [*Cuts him down.*] 'Tis a costly cloak you wear, methinks 'twill fit me well. [*Is about to take the cloak, but utters a cry and casts away his sword.*] My lord King! Not another stroke will I strike for you

DAGFINN.

You say that in such an hour as this?

THE BIRCHLEG.

Not another stroke!

DAGFINN.

[*Cuts him down.*] Well, you may e'en let it alone.

THE BIRCHLEG.

[*Pointing to the dead Vårbælg.*] Methought I had done enough when I slew my own brother. [*Dies.*

HÅKON.

His brother!

DAGFINN.

What! [*Goes up to the Vårbæla's body.*

HÅKON.

Is it true?

DAGFINN.

I fear me it is.

HÅKON.

[*Shaken.*] Here see we what a war we are waging. Brother against brother, father against son;—by God Almighty, this must have an end!

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

There comes the Duke, in full fight with Earl Knut's troop!

DAGFINN.

Bar the gate against him, king's men!

On the other side of the wall, the combatants come in sight. The Vårbælgs are forcing their way towards the left, driving the Birchlegs back, foot by foot. KING SKULE *rides his white war-horse, with his sword drawn.* PETER *walks at his side, holding the horse's bridle, and with his left hand uplifting a crucifix.* PAUL FLIDA *bears* SKULE'S *standard, which is blue, with a golden lion rampant, without the axe.*[1]

KING SKULE.

Cut them down! Spare no man! There is come a new heir[2] to the throne of Norway!

THE BIRCHLEGS.

A new heir, said he?

[1] The arms of Norway consist of a lion rampant, holding an axe.
[2] *Et nyt kongs-emne.*

HÅKON.

Skule Bårdsson, let us share the kingdom!

KING SKULE.

All or nought!

HÅKON.

Think of the Queen, your daughter!

KING SKULE.

I have a son, I have a son! I think of none but him!

HÅKON.

I too have a son;—if I fall the kingdom will be his!

KING SKULE.

Slay the King-child, wherever you find it! Slay it on the throne; slay it at the altar; slay it—slay it in the Queen's arms!

HÅKON.

There did you utter your own doom!

KING SKULE.

[*Slashing about him.*] Slay, slay without mercy! King Skule has a son! Slay, slay!

[*The fighting gradually passes away to the left.*

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

The Vårbælgs are hewing their way through!

DAGFINN.

Ay, but only to flee.

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

Yes, by Heaven,—the other gate stands open; they are fleeing already!

DAGFINN.

Up towards Martestokke. [*Calls out.*] After them, after them, Earl Knut! Take vengeance for the slaughter at Låka!

HÅKON.

You heard it: he proclaimed my child an outlaw—my innocent child, Norway's chosen king after me!

THE KING'S MEN.

Ay, ay, we heard it!

HÅKON.

And what is the punishment for such a crime?

THE MEN.

Death!

HÅKON.

Then must he die! [*Raises his hand to make oath.*] Here I swear it: Skule Bårdsson shall die, wherever he be met on unconsecrated ground!

DAGFINN.

'Tis every true man's duty to slay him.

A BIRCHLEG.

[*From the left.*] Duke Skule has taken to flight!

THE TOWNSFOLK.

The Birchlegs have conquered!

HÅKON.

What way?

THE BIRCHLEG.

Past Martestokke, up towards Eidsvold; most of them had horses waiting up in the streets, else had not one escaped with his life.

HÅKON.

Thanks be to God that has helped us yet again! Now may the Queen safely come ashore from the fleet.

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

[*Points off to the right.*] She has already landed, my lord; there she comes!

HÅKON.

[*To those nearest him.*] The heaviest task is yet before me; she is a loving daughter;—listen—no word to her of the danger that threatens her child. Swear to me, one and all, to keep ward over your King's son; but let her know nothing.

THE MEN.

[*Softly.*] We swear it.

MARGRETE.

[*Enters, with ladies and attendants, from the right.*] Hakon, my husband! Heaven has shielded you! you have conquered and are unhurt!

HÅKON.

Yes, I have conquered. Where is the child?

MARGRETE.

On board the King's ship, in the hands of trusty men.

HÅKON.

Go more of you thither. [*Some of the men go.*

MARGRETE.

Håkon, where is—Duke Skule?

HÅKON.

He has made for the Uplands.

MARGRETE.

He lives, then!—My husband, may I thank God that he lives?

HÅKON.

[*In painful agitation.*] Hear me, Margrete: you have been a faithful wife to me, you have followed me through good hap and ill, you have been unspeakably rich in love;—now must I cause you a heavy sorrow; I am loath to do it; but I am King, therefore must I——

MARGRETE.

[*In suspense.*] Has it to do with—the Duke?

HÅKON.

Yes. No bitterer lot could befall me than to live my life far from you; but if you think it must be so after

what I now tell you—if you feel that you can no longer sit by my side, no longer look at me without turning pale —well, we must even part—live each alone—and I shall not blame you for it.

MARGRETE.

Part from you! How can you think such a thought? Give me your hand——!

HÅKON.

Touch it not!—It has even now been lifted in oath——

MARGRETE.

In oath?

HÅKON.

An oath that set its sacred seal upon a death-warrant.

MARGRETE.

[*With a shriek.*] My father! Oh, my father!
[*Totters; two women rush forward to support her.*

HÅKON.

Yes, Margrete—his King has doomed your father to death.

MARGRETE.

Then well I know he has committed a greater crime than when he took the kingly title.

HÅKON.

That has he;—and now, if you feel that we must part, so let it be.

MARGRETE.

[*Coming close to him, firmly.*] We can never part! I am your wife, nought else in the world but your wife!

HÅKON.

Are you strong enough? Did you hear and understand all? I have doomed your father.

MARGRETE.

I heard and understood. You have doomed my father.

HÅKON.

And you ask not to know what was his crime?

MARGRETE.

'Tis enough that y o u know it.

HÅKON.

But it was to death that I doomed him!

MARGRETE.

[*Kneels before the* KING, *and kisses his hand.*] My husband and noble lord, your doom is just!

ACT FIFTH

A room in the palace at Nidaros. The entrance door is on the right; in front, on the same side, a window; to the left a smaller door. It is after night-fall. PAUL FLIDA, BÅRD BRATTE, *and several of* KING SKULE'S *principal followers are standing at the window and looking upward.*

A MAN-AT-ARMS.

How red it glows!

A SECOND.

It stretches over half the sky, like a flaming sword.

BÅRD BRATTE.

Holy King Olaf, what bodes such a sign of dread?

AN OLD VÅRBÆLG.

Assuredly it bodes a great chief's death.

PAUL FLIDA.

Håkon's death, my good Vårbælgs. He is lying out in the fiord with his fleet; we may look for him in the town to-night. This time, 'tis our turn to conquer!

BÅRD BRATTE.

Trust not to that; there is little heart in the host now.

THE OLD VÅRBÆLG.

And reason enough, in sooth; ever since the flight from Oslo has King Skule shut himself in, and will neither see nor speak with his men.

THE FIRST MAN-AT-ARMS.

There are those in the town who know not whether to believe him alive or dead.

PAUL FLIDA.

The King must out, however sick he may be. Speak to him, Bård Bratte—the safety of all is at stake.

BÅRD BRATTE.

It avails not; I have spoken to him already.

PAUL FLIDA.

Then must I try what I can do. [*Goes to the door on the left, and knocks.*] My lord King, you must take the helm in your own hands; things can no longer go on in this fashion.

KING SKULE.

[*Within.*] I am sick, Paul Flida.

PAUL FLIDA.

What else can you look for? You have eaten nought these two days; you must nourish and strengthen you——

KING SKULE.

I am sick.

PAUL FLIDA.

By the Almighty, 'tis no time for sickness. King Håkon lies out in the fiord, and may at any time be upon us here in Nidaros.

KING SKULE.

Strike him down for me! Slay him and the King-child.

PAUL FLIDA.

You must be with us, my lord!

KING SKULE.

No, no, no,—you are surest of fortune and victory when I am not there.

PETER.

[*Enters from the right; he is in armour.*] The townsfolk are ill at ease; they flock together in great masses before the palace.

BÅRD BRATTE.

Unless the King speak to them, they will desert him in the hour of need.

PETER.

Then must he speak to them. [*At the door on the left.*] Father! The Trönders, your trustiest subjects, will fall away from you if you give them not courage.

KING SKULE.

What said the skald?

PETER.

The skald?

KING SKULE.

The skald who died for my sake at Oslo. A man cannot give what he himself does not possess, he said.

PETER.

Then neither can you give away the kingdom; for it is mine after you!

KING SKULE.

Now I will come!

PAUL FLIDA.

God be praised.

KING SKULE.

[*Comes forward in the doorway; he is pale and haggard; his hair has grown very grey.*] You shall not look at me! I will not have you look at me now that I am sick! [*Goes up to* PETER.] Take from you the kingdom, you say? Great God in heaven, what was I about to do!

PETER.

Oh, forgive me;—I know that what you do is ever the right.

KING SKULE.

No, no, not hitherto; but now I will be strong and sound—I will act!

LOUD SHOUTS.

[*Without, on the right.*] King Skule! King Skule!

KING SKULE.

What is that?

BÅRD BRATTE.

[*At the window.*] The townsmen are flocking together; the whole courtyard is full of people;—you must speak to them.

KING SKULE.

Do I look like a king? Can I speak now?

PETER.

You must, my noble father!

KING SKULE.

Well, be it so. [*Goes to the window and draws the curtain aside, but lets it go quickly and starts back in terror.*] There hangs the flaming sword over me again!

PAUL FLIDA.

It bodes that the sword of victory is drawn for you.

KING SKULE.

Ah, were it but so! [*Goes to the window and speaks out.*] Trönders, what would you? Here stands your King.

A TOWNSMAN.

[*Without.*] Leave the town! The Birchlegs will burn and slay if they find you here.

KING SKULE.

We must all hold together. I have been a gracious King to you; I have craved but small war-tax——

A MAN'S VOICE.

[*Down in the crowd.*] What call you all the blood, then, that flowed at Låka and Oslo?

A WOMAN.

Give me my betrothed again!

A BOY.

Give me my father and my brother!

ANOTHER WOMAN.

Give me my three sons, King Skule!

A MAN.

He is no King; homage has not been done him on St. Olaf's shrine!

MANY VOICES.

No, no—no homage has been done him on St. Olaf's shrine! He is no King!

KING SKULE.

[*Shrinks behind the curtain.*] No homage——! No king!

PAUL FLIDA.

'Twas a dire mischance that the shrine was not brought forth when you were chosen.

BÅRD BRATTE.

Should the townsfolk desert us, we cannot hold Nidaros if the Birchlegs come.

KING SKULE.

And they will desert us, so long as homage has not been done to me on the Saint's shrine.

PETER.

Then let the shrine be brought forth, and take our homage now!

PAUL FLIDA.

[*Shaking his head.*] How should that be possible?

PETER.

Is aught impossible, where he is concerned? Sound the call for the folkmote, and bring forth the shrine!

SEVERAL OF THE MEN.

[*Shrinking back.*] Sacrilege!

PETER.

No sacrilege!—Come, come! The monks are well disposed towards King Skule; they will agree——

PAUL FLIDA.

That they will not; they dare not, for the Archbishop.

PETER.

Are you King's men, and will not lend your aid when so great a cause is at stake! Good, there are others below of better will. My father and King, the monks shall give way; I will pray, I will beseech; sound

the summons for the folkmote; you shall bear your kingship rightfully. [*Rushes out to the right.*

KING SKULE.

[*Beaming with joy.*] Saw you him! Saw you my gallant son! How his eyes shone! Yes, we will all fight and conquer. How strong are the Birchlegs?

PAUL FLIDA.

Not stronger than that we may master them, if but the townsfolk hold to us!

KING SKULE.

They s h a l l hold to us. We must all be at one now and put an end to this time of dread. See you not that 'tis Heaven's command that we should end it? Heaven is wroth with all Norway for the deeds that have so long been doing. A flaming sword glows night by night in the sky; women swoon and bear children in the churches; a frenzy creeps abroad among priests and monks, causing them to run through the streets and proclaim that the last day is come. Ay, by the Almighty, this shall be ended at one stroke!

PAUL FLIDA.

What are your commands?

KING SKULE.

All the bridges shall be broken down!

PAUL FLIDA.

Go, and let all the bridges be broken.

[*One of the Men-at-arms goes out to the right.*

KING SKULE.

Gather all our men upon the foreshore; not one Birch-leg shall set foot in Nidaros.

PAUL FLIDA.

Well spoken, King.

KING SKULE.

When the shrine is borne forth, let the horn sound to the folkmote. The host and the townsfolk shall be called together.

PAUL FLIDA.

[*To one of the men.*] Go forth and bid the hornblower wind his horn in all the streets. [*The man goes.*

KING SKULE.

[*Addresses the people from the window.*] Hold fast to me, all my sorrowing people. There shall come peace and light over the land once more, as in Håkon's first glad days, when the fields yielded two harvests every summer. Hold fast to me; believe in me and trust to me; 'tis that I need so unspeakably. I will watch over you and fight for you; I will bleed and die for you, if need be; but fail me not, and doubt not——! [*Loud cries, as though of terror, are heard among the people.*] What is that?

A WILD VOICE.

Atone! Atone!

BÅRD BRATTE.

[*Looks out.*] 'Tis a priest possessed of the devil!

PAUL FLIDA.

He is tearing his cowl to shreds and scourging himself with a whip.

THE VOICE.

Atone, atone! The last day is come.

MANY VOICES.

Flee, flee! Woe upon Nidaros! A deed of sin!

KING SKULE.

What has befallen?

BÅRD BRATTE.

All flee, all shrink away as though a wild beast were in their midst.

KING SKULE.

Yes, all flee. [*With a cry of joy.*] Ha! it matters not. We are saved! See, see—King Olaf's shrine stands in the middle of the courtyard.

PAUL FLIDA.

King Olaf's shrine!

BÅRD BRATTE.

Ay, by Heaven—there it stands!

KING SKULE.

The monks are true to me; so good a deed have they never done before!

PAUL FLIDA.

Hark! the call to the folkmote!

KING SKULE.

Now shall lawful homage be done to me.

PETER.

[*Enters from the right.*] Take on you the kingly mantle; now stands the shrine out yonder.

KING SKULE.

Then you have saved the kingdom for me and for yourself; and tenfold will we thank the pious monks for yielding.

PETER.

The monks, father—you have nought to thank them for.

KING SKULE.

'Twas not they that helped you?

PETER.

They laid the ban of the Church on whoever should dare to touch the holy thing.

KING SKULE.

The Archbishop then! At last he gives way.

PETER

The Archbishop hurled forth direr curses than the monks.

KING SKULE.

Ah, then I see that I still have trusty men. You here, who should have been the first to serve me, stood terrified and shrank back—but down in the crowd have I friends who for my sake fear not to take so great a sin upon their souls.

PETER.

You have not o n e trusty man who dared to take the sin upon him.

KING SKULE.

Almighty God! has then a miracle come to pass? Who bore out the holy thing?

PETER.

I, my father!

KING SKULE.

[*With a shriek.*] You!

THE MEN.

[*Shrink back appalled.*] Church-robber!

[PAUL FLIDA, BÅRD BRATTE, *and one or two others go out.*

PETER.

The deed had to be done. No man's faith is sure ere homage be lawfully done to you. I begged, I besought the monks; it availed not. Then I broke open the church door; none dared to follow me. I sprang up to the high altar, gripped the handle, and pressed hard with my knees; 'twas as though an unseen power gave me more than human strength. The shrine came loose, I

dragged it after me down the nave, while the ban moaned like a storm high up under the vaultings. I dragged it out of the church; all fled and shrank from me. When I came to the middle of the courtyard the handle broke; here it is! [*Holds it aloft.*

KING SKULE.

[*Quietly, appalled.*] Church-robber.

PETER.

For your sake; for the sake of your great king's-thought! You will wipe out the sin; all that is evil you will wipe away. Light and peace will follow you; a glorious day will dawn over the land—what matter, then, if there went a storm-night before it?

KING SKULE.

There was as 'twere a halo round your head when your mother brought you to me; now I see in its stead the lightnings of the ban.

PETER.

Father, father, think not of me; be not afraid for my woe or weal. Is it not your will I have fulfilled?—how can it be accounted to me for a crime?

KING SKULE.

I hungered for your faith in me, and your faith has turned to sin.

PETER.

[*Wildly.*] For your sake, for your sake! Therefore God dare not deny to blot it out!

KING SKULE.

"Pure and blameless," I swore to Ingeborg—and he scoffs at heaven!

PAUL FLIDA.

[*Entering.*] All is in uproar! The impious deed has struck terror to your men; they flee into the churches.

KING SKULE.

They s h a l l out; they m u s t out!

BÅRD BRATTE.

[*Entering.*] The townsfolk have risen against you; they are slaying the Vårbælgs wherever they find them, on the streets or in the houses!

A MAN-AT-ARMS.

[*Entering.*] The Birchlegs are sailing up the river!

KING SKULE.

Summon all my men together! None must fail me here!

PAUL FLIDA.

They will not come; they are benumbed with dread.

KING SKULE.

[*Despairingly.*] But I c a n n o t fall now! My son must not die with a deadly sin upon his soul!

PETER.

Think not of me; 'tis you alone that are to be thought of. Let us make for Indherred; there all men are true to you!

KING SKULE.

Ay, to flight! Follow me, whoso would save his life!

BÅRD BRATTE.

What way?

KING SKULE.

Over the bridge!

PAUL FLIDA.

All bridges are broken down, my lord.

KING SKULE.

Broken down——! All the bridges broken, say you?

PAUL FLIDA.

Had you broken them down at Oslo, you might have let them stand at Nidaros.

KING SKULE.

We must over the river none the less;—we have our lives and our souls to save! To flight! To flight!

[HE *and* PETER *rush out to the left.*

BÅRD BRATTE.

Ay, better so than to fall at the hands of the townfolk and the Birchlegs.

PAUL FLIDA.

In God's name, then, to flight! [*All follow* SKULE.

The room stands empty for a short time; a distant and confused noise is heard from the streets; then a troop of armed townsmen rushes in by the door on the right.

A TOWNSMAN.

Here! He must be here!

ANOTHER.

Slay him!

MANY.

Slay the church-robber too!

A SINGLE ONE.

Go carefully! They may yet bite!

THE FIRST TOWNSMAN.

No need; the Birchlegs are already coming up the street.

A TOWNSMAN.

[*Entering.*] Too late—King Skule has fled!

MANY.

Whither? Whither?

THE NEW-COMER.

Into one of the churches, methinks; they are full of the Vårbælgs.

THE FIRST TOWNSMAN.

Then let us seek for him; great thanks and reward will King Håkon give to the man who slays Skule.

ANOTHER.

Here come the Birchlegs.

A THIRD.

King Håkon himself!

MANY OF THE CROWD.

[*Shout.*] Hail to King Håkon Håkonsson!

HÅKON.

[*Enters from the right, followed by* GREGORIUS JONSSON, DAGFINN THE PEASANT, *and many others.*] Ay, now are you humble, you Trönders; you have stood against me long enough.

THE FIRST TOWNSMAN.

[*Kneeling.*] Mercy, my lord! Skule Bårdsson bore so hardly on us!

ANOTHER.

[*Also kneeling.*] He compelled us, else had we never followed him.

THE FIRST.

He seized our goods and forced us to fight for his unrighteous cause.

THE SECOND.

Alas, noble lord, he has been a scourge to his friends no less than to his foes.

MANY VOICES.

Ay, ay,—Skule Bårdsson has been a scourge to the whole land.

DAGFINN.

That, at least, is true enough.

HÅKON.

Good; with you townsfolk I will speak later; 'tis my purpose to punish sternly all transgressions; but first there are other things to be thought of. Knows any man where Skule Bårdsson is?

MANY.

In one of the churches, lord!

HÅKON.

Know you that for certain?

THE TOWNSMEN.

Ay, there are all the Vårbælgs.

HÅKON.

[*Softly to* DAGFINN.] He must be found; set a watch on all the churches in the town.

DAGFINN.

And when he is found, he must straightway be slain.

HÅKON.

[*Softly.*] Slain? Dagfinn, Dagfinn, how heavy a deed it seems!

DAGFINN.

My lord, you swore it solemnly at Oslo.

HÅKON.

And all men in the land will call for his death. [*Turns to* GREGORIUS JONSSON *and says, unheard by the others*]

Go; you were once his friend; seek him out and prevail on him to fly the land.

GREGORIUS.

[*Joyfully.*] You will suffer it, my lord!

HÅKON.

For the sake of my gentle, well-beloved wife.

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

But if he should n o t flee? If he will not or cannot?

HÅKON.

Then, in God's name, I may not spare him; then must my kingly word be fulfilled. Go!

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

I go, and shall do my utmost. Heaven grant I may succeed. [*Goes out by the right.*

HÅKON.

You, Dagfinn, go with trusty men down to the King's ship; you shall conduct the Queen and her child up to Elgesæter[1] convent.

DAGFINN.

My lord, think you she will be safe there?

HÅKON.

Nowhere safer. The Vårbælgs have shut themselves up in the churches, and she has besought to be sent thither; her mother is at Elgesæter.

[1] *Elgesæter* = Elk-châlet.

DAGFINN.

Ay, ay, that I know.

HÅKON.

Greet the Queen most lovingly from me; and greet Lady Ragnhild also. You may tell them that so soon as the Vårbælgs shall have made submission and been taken to grace, all the bells in Nidaros shall be rung, for a sign that there has come peace in the land once more.—You townsfolk shall reckon with me to-morrow, and punishment shall be meted to each according to his misdeeds. [*Goes with his men.*

THE FIRST TOWNSMAN.

Woe upon us to-morrow!

THE SECOND.

We have a long reckoning to pay.

THE FIRST.

We, who have stood against Håkon so long—who bore our part in acclaiming Skule when he took the kingly title.

THE SECOND.

Who gave Skule both ships and war-tribute—who bought all the goods he seized from Håkon's thanes.

THE FIRST.

Ay, woe upon us to-morrow!

A TOWNSMAN.

[*Rushes in from the left.*] Where is Håkon? Where is the King?

THE FIRST.

What would you with him?

THE NEW-COMER.

Bring him great and weighty tidings.

MANY.

What tidings?

THE NEW-COMER.

I tell them to no other than the King himself.

MANY.

Ay, tell us, tell us!

THE NEW-COMER.

Skule Bårdsson is fleeing up toward Elgesæter.

THE FIRST.

It cannot be! He is in one of the churches.

THE NEW-COMER.

No, no; he and his son crossed over the river in a skiff.

THE FIRST.

Ha, then we can save us from Håkon's wrath!

THE SECOND.

Ay, let us forthwith give him to know where Skule is.

THE FIRST.

Nay, better than that; we will say nought, but ourselves go up to Elgesæter and slay Skule.

THE SECOND.

Ay, ay—that will we!

A THIRD.

But did not many Vårbælgs go with him over the river?

THE NEW-COMER.

No, there were but few men in the boat.

THE FIRST.

We will arm us as best we can. Oh, now are we townsfolk safe enough! Let no man know what we are about; we are enough for the task!—And now, away to Elgesæter.

ALL.

[*Softly.*] Ay, away to Elgesæter!

[*They go out to the left, rapidly but cautiously.*

A fir-wood on the hills above Nidaros. It is moonlight, but the night is misty, so that the background is seen indistinctly, and sometimes scarcely at all. Tree-stumps and great boulders lie round about. KING SKULE, PETER, PAUL FLIDA, BÅRD BRATTE, *and other* VÅRBÆLGS *come through the wood from the left.*

PETER.

Come hither and rest you, my father.

KING SKULE.

Ay, let me rest, rest. [*Sinks down beside a stone.*

PETER.

How goes it with you?

KING SKULE.

I am hungry! I am sick, sick! I see dead men's shadows!

PETER.

[*Springing up.*] Help here—bread for the King!

BÅRD BRATTE.

Here is every man king; for life is at stake. Stand up, Skule Bårdsson, if you be king! Lie not there to rule the land.

PETER.

If you scoff at my father, I will kill you.

BÅRD BRATTE.

I shall be killed whatever betides; for me King Håkon will have no grace; for I was his thane, and deserted him for Skule's sake. Think of somewhat that may save us. No deed so desperate but I will risk it now.

A VÅRBÆLG.

Could we but get over to the convent at Holm?

PAUL FLIDA.

Better to Elgesæter.

BÅRD BRATTE.

[*With a sudden outburst.*] Best of all to go down to Håkon's ship and bear away the King-child.

PAUL FLIDA.

Are you distraught?

BÅRD BRATTE.

No, no; 'tis our one hope, and easy enough to do. The Birchlegs are ransacking every house, and keeping watch on all the churches; they think none of us can have taken flight, since all the bridges are broken. There can be but few men on board the ships; when once we have his heir in our power, Håkon must grant us peace, else will his child die with us. Who will go with me to save our lives?

PAUL FLIDA.

Not I, if they are to be saved in such wise.

SEVERAL.

Not I! Not I!

PETER.

Ha, but if it were to save my father——!

BÅRD BRATTE.

If you will go with me, come. First I go down to Hladehammer; there lies the troop we met at the bottom of the hill; they are the wildest daredevils of all the Vårbælgs; they had swum the river, knowing that they would find no grace in the churches. They are the lads for a raid on the King's ship! Which of you will follow me?

SOME.

I! I!

PETER.

Mayhap I too; but first must I see my father into safe shelter.

BÅRD BRATTE.

Ere daybreak will we make speed up the river. Come, here goes a short way downwards towards Hlade.

[*He and some others go out to the right.*

PETER.

[*To* PAUL FLIDA.] Let not my father know aught of this; he is soul-sick to-night, we must act for him. There is safety in Bård Bratte's deed; ere daybreak shall the King-child be in our hands.

PAUL FLIDA.

To be slain, most like. See you not that it is a sin——

PETER.

Nay, it cannot be a sin; for my father doomed the child in Oslo. Sooner or later it must die, for it blocks my father's path;—my father has a great king's-thought to carry through; it matters not who or how many fall for its sake.

PAUL FLIDA.

Hapless for you was the day you came to know that you were King Skule's son. [*Listening.*] Hist!—cast you flat to the ground; there come people this way.

[*All throw themselves down behind stones and stumps; a troop of people, some riding, some on foot, can be seen indistinctly through the mist and between the trees; they come from the left, and pass on to the right.*

PETER.

'Tis the Queen!

PAUL FLIDA.

Ay; she is talking with Dagfinn the Peasant. Hush!

PETER.

They are making for Elgesæter. The King-child is with them!

PAUL FLIDA.

And the Queen's ladies.

PETER.

But only four men! Up, up, King Skule—now is your kingdom saved!

KING SKULE.

My kingdom? 'Tis dark, my kingdom—like the angel's that rose against God.

A party of MONKS *comes from the right.*

A MONK.

Who speaks there? Is it King Skule's men.

PAUL FLIDA.

King Skule himself.

THE MONK.

[*To* SKULE.] God be praised that we met you, dear lord! Some townsmen gave us to know that you had

taken the upward path, and we are no less unsafe than you in Nidaros.

PETER.

You have deserved death, you who denied to give forth St. Olaf's shrine.

THE MONK.

The Archbishop forbade it; but none the less we would fain serve King Skule; we have ever held to him. See, we have brought with us robes of our Order for you and your men; put them on, and then can you easily make your way into one convent or another, and can seek to gain grace of Håkon.

KING SKULE.

Ay, let me put on the robe; my son and I must stand on consecrated ground. I will to Elgesæter.

PETER.

[*Softly, to* PAUL FLIDA.] See that my father comes safely thither.

PAUL FLIDA.

Bethink you that there are Birchlegs at Elgesæter.

PETER.

But four men; you may easily deal with them, and once inside the convent walls they will not dare to touch you. I will seek BÅRD BRATTE.

PAUL FLIDA.

Nay, do not so!

PETER.

Not on the King's ship, but at Elgesæter, must the outlaws save the kingdom for my father.

[*Goes quickly out to the right.*

A VÅRBÆLG.

[*Whispering to another.*] Go y o u to Elgesæter with Skule?

THE OTHER.

Hist; no; the Birchlegs are there!

THE FIRST.

Neither will I go; but say nought to the rest.

THE MONK.

And now away, two and two,—one spearman and one monk.

ANOTHER MONK.

[*Sitting on a stump behind the rest.*] I will guide King Skule.

KING SKULE.

Know you the way?

THE MONK.

The broad way.

THE FIRST MONK.

Haste you; let us take different paths, and meet outside the convent gate.

[*They go out among the trees, to the right; the fog lifts and the comet shows itself, red and glowing, through the hazy air.*

KING SKULE.

Peter, my son——! [*Starts backwards.*] Ha, there is the flaming sword in heaven!

THE MONK.

[*Sitting behind him on the stump.*] And here am I!

KING SKULE.

Who are you?

THE MONK.

An old acquaintance.

KING SKULE.

Paler man have I never seen.

THE MONK.

But you know me not?

KING SKULE.

'Tis you that are to lead me to Elgesæter.

THE MONK.

'Tis I that will lead you to the throne.

KING SKULE.

Can you do that?

THE MONK.

I can, if you but will it.

KING SKULE.

And by what means?

THE MONK.

By the means I have used before;—I will take you up into a high mountain and show you all the glory of the world.

KING SKULE.

All the glory of the world have I seen ere now, in dreams of temptation.

THE MONK.

'Twas I that gave you those dreams.

KING SKULE.

Who are you?

THE MONK.

An envoy from the oldest Pretender in the world.

KING SKULE.

From the oldest Pretender in the world?

THE MONK.

From the first Earl, who rose against the greatest kingdom, and himself founded a kingdom that shall endure beyond doomsday.

KING SKULE.

[*Shrieks.*] Bishop Nicholas!

THE MONK.

[*Rising.*] Do you know me now? We were friends of yore,
And 'tis you that have brought me back;
Once the self-same galley our fortunes bore,

And we sailed on the self-same tack.
At our parting I quailed, in the gloom and the blast;
For a hawk in his talons had gripped my soul fast;
I besought them to chant and to ply the bell,
And I bought me masses and prayers as well,—
They read fourteen, though I'd paid but for seven;
Yet they brought me no nearer the gates of heaven.

KING SKULE.

And you come from down yonder——?

THE MONK.

Yes, from the kingdom down yonder I'm faring;
The kingdom men always so much miscall.
I vow 'tis in nowise so bad after all,
And the heat, to my thinking, is never past bearing.

KING SKULE.

And it seems you have learnt skald-craft, old Bagler-chieftain!

THE MONK.

Not only skald-craft, but store of Latinity!
Once my Latin was not over strong, you know;
Now few can beat it for ease and flow.
To take any station in yonder vicinity,
Ay, even to pass at the gate, for credential
A knowledge of Latin is well-nigh essential.
You can't but make progress with so many able
And learned companions each day at the table,—
Full fifty ex-popes by my side carouse, and
Five hundred cardinals, skalds seven thousand.

KING SKULE.

Fewer than one.

MARGRETE.

He is alone, Dagfinn.

LADY RAGNHILD.

Heaven's wrath fall upon you if you deny him sanctuary!

DAGFINN.

In God's name, then!

[*He opens the gate; the Birchlegs respectfully uncover their heads.* KING SKULE *enters the courtyard.*

MARGRETE.

[*Throwing herself on his neck.*] My father! My dear, unhappy father!

LADY RAGNHILD.

[*Interposing wildly between him and the Birchlegs.*] Ye who feign reverence for him, ye will betray him, like Judas. Dare not to come near him! Ye shall not lay a finger on him while I live!

DAGFINN.

Here he is safe, for he is on holy ground.

MARGRETE.

And not one of all your men had the heart to follow you this night!

A son to succeed to the throne without wrangling;
For the people are tired of this hundred-years' jangling.
Rouse you, King Skule! one great endeavour!
The foe must perish to-night or never!
See, to the northward how light it has grown,
See how the fog lifts o'er fiord and o'er valley—
There gather noiselessly galley on galley—
Hark! men are marching with rumble and drone!
One word of promise, and all is your own—
Hundreds of glittering sails on the water,
Thousands of warriors hurtling to slaughter.

KING SKULE.

What word would you have?

THE MONK.

For raising you highest, my one condition
Is just that you follow your heart's ambition;
All Norway is yours, to the kingship I'll speed you,
If only you vow that your son shall succeed you!

KING SKULE.

[*Raising his hand as if for an oath.*] My son shall——
[*Stops suddenly, and breaks forth in terror.*] The church-robber! All the might to him! Ha! now I understand;—you seek for his soul's perdition! Get thee behind me, get thee behind me! [*Stretches out his arms to heaven.*] Oh have mercy on me, thou to whom I now call for help in my sorest need!

[*He falls prone to the earth.*

THE MONK.

Accurséd! He's slipped through my fingers at last—
And I thought of a surety I held him so fast!

But the Light, it seems, had a trick in store
That I knew not of—and the game is o'er.
Well, well; what matters a little delay?
Perpetuum mobile's well under way;
My might is assured through the years and the ages,
The haters of light shall be still in my wages;
In Norway my empire for ever is founded,
Though it be to my subjects a riddle unsounded.
[*Coming forward.*
While to their life-work Norsemen set out
Will-lessly wavering, daunted with doubt,
While hearts are shrunken, minds helplessly shivering,
Weak as a willow-wand wind-swept and quivering,—
While about one thing alone they're united,
Namely, that greatness be stoned and despited,—
When they seek honour in fleeing and falling
Under the banner of baseness unfurled,—
Then Bishop Nicholas 'tends to his calling,
The Bagler-Bishop's at work in the world!
[*He disappears in the fog among the trees.*

KING SKULE.

[*After a short pause, half rises and looks around.*] Where is he, my black comrade? [*Springs up.*] My guide, my guide, where are you? Gone!—No matter; now I myself know the way, both to Elgesæter and beyond. [*Goes out to the right.*

The courtyard of Elgesæter Convent. To the left lies the chapel, with an entrance from the courtyard; the windows are lighted up. Along the opposite side of the space stretch some lower buildings; in the back, the convent wall with a strong gate, which is locked.

It is a clear moonlight night. Three Birchleg Chiefs stand by the gate; MARGRETE, LADY RAGNHILD, *and* DAGFINN THE PEASANT *come out from the chapel.*

LADY RAGNHILD.

[*Half to herself.*] King Skule had to flee into the church, you say! He, he, a fugitive! begging at the altar for peace—begging for his life mayhap—oh no, no, that could never be; but God will punish you who dared to let it come to this!

MARGRETE.

My dear, dear mother, curb yourself; you know not what you say; 'tis your grief that speaks.

LADY RAGNHILD.

Hear me, ye Birchlegs! 'Tis Håkon Håkonsson that should lie before the altar, and beseech King Skule for life and peace.

A BIRCHLEG.

It ill beseems loyal men to listen to such words.

MARGRETE.

Bow your heads before a wife's sorrow!

LADY RAGNHILD.

King Skule doomed! Look to yourselves, look to yourselves all of you, when he regains his power.

DAGFINN.

That will never be, Lady Ragnhild.

MARGRETE.

Hush, hush!

LADY RAGNHILD.

Think you Håkon Håkonsson dare let his doom be fulfilled if the King should fall into his hands?

DAGFINN.

King Håkon himself best knows whether a king's oath can be broken.

LADY RAGNHILD.

[*To* MARGRETE.] And this man of blood have you followed in faith and love! Are you your father's child? May the wrath of heaven——! Go from me, go from me!

MARGRETE.

Blessed be your lips, although now they curse me.

LADY RAGNHILD.

I must down to Nidaros and into the church to find King Skule. He sent me from him when he sat victorious on the throne; then, truly, he had no need of me—now will he not be wroth if I come to him. Open the gate for me; let me go to Nidaros!

MARGRETE.

My mother, for God's pity's sake——!

[*A loud knocking at the convent gate.*

DAGFINN.

Who knocks?

KING SKULE.

[*Without.*] A king.

DAGFINN.

Skule Bårdsson.

LADY RAGNHILD.

King Skule.

MARGRETE.

My father!

KING SKULE.

Open, open!

DAGFINN.

We open not here to outlaws.

KING SKULE.

'Tis a king who knocks, I tell you; a king who has no roof over his head; a king whose life is forfeit if he reach not consecrated ground.

MARGRETE.

Dagfinn, Dagfinn, 'tis my father.

DAGFINN.

[*Goes to the gate and opens a small shutter.*] Come you with many men to the convent?

KING SKULE.

With all the men that were true to me in my need

DAGFINN.

And how many be they?

KING SKULE.

Both monks and spearmen brought me on the way; but they slipped from me one by one, for they knew there were Birchlegs at Elgesæter. Paul Flida was the last to leave me; he came with me to the convent gate; there he gave me his last hand-grip, in memory of the time when there were Varbælgs in Norway.

DAGFINN.

[*To the Birchlegs.*] Get you in, chieftains, and set you as guards about the King-child; I must to Nidaros to acquaint the King that Skule Bårdsson is at Elgesæter; in so weighty a matter 'tis for him to act.

MARGRETE.

Oh, Dagfinn, Dagfinn, have you the heart for that?

DAGFINN.

Else should I ill serve King and land. [*To the men.*] Lock the gates after me, watch over the child, and open to none until the King be come. [*Softly to* SKULE.] Farewell, Skule Bårdsson—and God grant you a blessed end.

[*Goes out by the gate; the Birchlegs close it after him, and go into the chapel.*

LADY RAGNHILD.

Ay, let Håkon come; I will not loose you; I will hold you straitly and tenderly in my arms, as I never held you before.

MARGRETE.

Oh, how pale you are—and aged; you are cold.

KING SKULE.

I am not cold—but I am weary, weary.

MARGRETE.

Come in then, and rest you——

KING SKULE.

Yes, yes; 'twill soon be time to rest.

SIGRID.

[*From the chapel.*] You come at last, my brother!

KING SKULE.

Sigrid! you here?

SIGRID.

I promised that we should meet when you were fain of me in your sorest need.

KING SKULE.

Where is your child, Margrete?

MARGRETE.

He sleeps, in the sacristy.

KING SKULE.

Then is our whole house gathered at Elgesæter to-night

SIGRID.

Ay, gathered after straying long and far.

KING SKULE.

Håkon Håkonsson alone is wanting.

MARGRETE AND LADY RAGNHILD.

[*Cling about him, in an outburst of sorrow.*] My father!—My husband!

KING SKULE.

[*Looking at them, much moved.*] Have you loved me so deeply, you two? I sought after happiness abroad, and heeded not the home wherein I might have found it. I pursued after love through sin and guilt, little dreaming that 'twas mine already, in right of God's law and man's. —And you, Ragnhild, my wife, you, against whom I have sinned so deeply, you take me to your warm, soft heart in the hour of my sorest need; you can tremble and be afraid for the life of the man who has never cast a ray of sunshine upon your path.

LADY RAGNHILD.

Have y o u sinned? Oh, Skule, speak not so; think you I should ever dare accuse you! From the first I was too mean a mate for you, my noble husband; there can rest no guilt on any deed of yours.

KING SKULE.

Have you believed in me so surely, Ragnhild?

LADY RAGNHILD.

From the first day I saw you.

KING SKULE.

[*With animation.*] When Håkon comes, I will beg grace of him! You gentle, loving women,—oh, but it is fair to live!

SIGRID.

[*With an expression of terror.*] Skule, my brother! Woe to you if you stray from the path this night.

[*A loud noise without; immediately afterwards, a knocking at the gate.*

MARGRETE.

Hark, hark! Who comes in such haste?

LADY RAGNHILD

Who knocks at the gate?

VOICES.

[*Without.*] Townsfolk from Nidaros! Open! We know that Skule Bårdsson is within!

KING SKULE.

Ay, he is within; what would ye with him?

NOISY VOICES.

[*Without.*] Come out, come out! Death to the evil man!

MARGRETE.

You townsfolk dare to threaten that?

A SINGLE VOICE.

King Håkon doomed him at Oslo.

ANOTHER.

'Tis every man's duty to slay him!

MARGRETE.

I am the Queen; I command you to depart!

A VOICE.

'Tis Skule Bårdsson's daughter, and not the Queen, that speaks thus.

ANOTHER.

You have no power over life and death; the King has doomed him!

LADY RAGNHILD.

Into the church, Skule! For God's mercy's sake, let not the bloodthirsty caitiffs approach you!

KING SKULE.

Ay, into the church; I would not fall at the hands of such as these. My wife, my daughter; meseems I have found peace and light; oh, I cannot lose them again so soon! [*Moves towards the chapel.*

PETER.

[*Without, on the right.*] My father, my king! Now will you soon have the victory!

KING SKULE.

[*With a shriek.*] He! He!

[*Sinks down upon the church steps.*

LADY RAGNHILD.

Who is it?

A TOWNSMAN.

[*Without.*] See, see! the church-robber climbs over the convent roof!

OTHERS.

Stone him! Stone him!

PETER.

[*Appears on a roof to the right, and jumps down into the yard.*] Well met again, my father!

KING SKULE.

[*Looks at him aghast.*] You—I had forgotten you——! Whence come you?

PETER.

[*Wildly.*] Where is the King-child?

MARGRETE.

The King-child!

KING SKULE.

[*Starts up.*] Whence come you, I ask?

PETER.

From Hladehammer; I have given Bård Bratte and the Varbælgs to know that the King-child lies at Elgesæter to-night.

MARGRETE.

O God!

KING SKULE.

You have done that! And now——?

PETER.

He is gathering together his men, and they are hasting up to the convent.—Where is the King-child, woman?

MARGRETE.

[*Who has placed herself before the church door.*] He sleeps in the sacristy!

PETER.

'Twere the same if he slept on the altar! I have dragged out St. Olaf's shrine—I fear not to drag out the King-child as well.

LADY RAGNHILD.

[*Calls to* SKULE.] And he it is you have loved so deeply!

MARGRETE.

Father, father! How could you forget us all for his sake?

KING SKULE.

He was pure as a lamb of God when the penitent woman gave him to me;—'tis his faith in me has made him what he now is.

PETER.

[*Without heeding him.*] The child must out! Slay it, slay it in the Queen's arms,—that was King Skule's word in Oslo!

MARGRETE.

Oh shame, oh shame!

PETER.

A saint might do it unsinning, at my father's command! My father is King; for the great king's-thought is his!

TOWNSMEN.

[*Knocking at the gate.*] Open! Come out, you and the church-robber, else will we burn the convent dow

KING SKULE.

[*As if seized by a strong resolution.*] The great king's-thought! 'Tis t h a t has poisoned your young loving soul! Pure and blameless I was to give you back; 'tis faith in me that drives you thus wildly from crime to crime, from deadly sin to deadly sin! Oh, but I can save you yet: I can save us all! [*Calls toward the background.*] Wait, wait, ye townsmen without there: I come!

MARGRETE.

[*Seizing his hand in terror.*] My father! what would you do?

LADY RAGNHILD.

[*Clinging to him with a shriek.*] Skule!

SIGRID.

[*Tears them away from him, and calls with wild, radiant joy.*] Loose him, loose him, women;—now his thought puts forth wings!

KING SKULE.

[*Firmly and forcibly, to* PETER.] You saw in me the heaven-chosen one,—him who should do the great king's-work in the land. Look at me better, misguided boy! The rags of kingship I have decked myself withal, they were borrowed and stolen—now I put them off me, one by one.

PETER.

[*In dread.*] My great, my noble father, speak not thus!

KING SKULE.

The king's-thought is Håkon's, not mine; to him alone has the Lord granted the power that can act it out. You have believed in a lie; turn from me, and save your soul.

PETER.

[*In a broken voice.*] The king's-thought is Håkon's!

KING SKULE.

I yearned to be the greatest in the land. My God! my God! behold, I abase myself before thee, and stand as the least of all men.

PETER.

Take me from the earth, O Lord! Punish me for all my sin; but take me from the earth; for here am I homeless now! [*Sinks down upon the church steps.*

KING SKULE.

I had a friend who bled for me at Oslo. He said: A man can die for another's life-work; but if he is to go

on living, he must live for his own.—I have no life-work to live for, neither can I live for Håkon's,—but I can die for it.

MARGRETE.

Nay, nay, that shall you never do!

KING SKULE.

[*Takes her hand, and looks at her tenderly.*] Do you love your husband, Margrete?

MARGRETE.

Better than the whole world.

KING SKULE.

You could endure that he should doom me; but could you also endure that he should let the doom be fulfilled?

MARGRETE.

Lord of heaven, give me strength!

KING SKULE.

Could you, Margrete?

MARGRETE.

[*Softly and shuddering.*] No, no—we should have to part,—I could never see him more!

KING SKULE.

You would darken the fairest light of his life and of yours;—be at peace, Margrete,—it shall not be needful.

LADY RAGNHILD.

Flee from the land, Skule; I will follow you whithersoever you will.

KING SKULE.

[*Shaking his head.*] With a mocking shade between us?—To-night have I found you for the first time; there must fall no shade between me and you, my silent, faithful wife;—therefore must we not seek to unite our lives on this earth.

SIGRID.

My kingly brother! I see you need me not;—I see you know what path to take.

KING SKULE.

There are men born to live, and men born to die. My desire was ever thitherward where God's finger pointed not the way for me; therefore I never saw my path clear, till now. My peaceful home-life have I wrecked; I can never win it back again. My sins against Håkon I can atone by freeing him from a kingly duty which must have parted him from his dearest treasure. The townsfolk stand without; I will not wait for King Håkon! The Varbælgs are near; so long as I live they will not swerve from their purpose; if they find me here, I cannot save your child, Margrete.—See, look upwards! See how it wanes and pales, the flaming sword that has hung over my head! Yes, yes,—God has spoken and I have understood him, and his wrath is appeased. Not in the sanctuary of Elgesæter will I cast me down and beg for grace of an earthly king;—I must into the mighty church roofed with the vault of

stars and 'tis the King of Kings I must implore for grace and mercy over all my life-work.

SIGRID.

Withstand him not! Withstand not the call of God! The day dawns; it dawns in Norway and it dawns in his restless soul! Have not we trembling women cowered long enough in our secret rooms, terror-stricken and hidden in the darkest corners, listening to all the horror that was doing without, listening to the bloody pageant that stalked over the land from end to end! Have we not lain pale and stone-like in the churches, not daring to look forth, even as Christ's disciples lay in Jerusalem on the Great Good Friday when the Lord was led by to Golgotha! Use thy wings, and woe to them who would bind thee now!

LADY RAGNHILD.

Fare forth in peace, my husband; fare thither where no mocking shade shall stand between us, when we meet. [*Hastens into the chapel.*

MARGRETE.

My father, farewell, farewell,—a thousand times farewell! [*Follows* LADY RAGNHILD.

SIGRID.

[*Opens the church door and calls in.*] To your knees, all ye women! Assemble yourselves in prayer; send up a message in song to the Lord, and tell him that now Skule Bårdsson comes penitent home from his rebellious race on earth.

KING SKULE.

Sigrid, my faithful sister, greet King Håkon from me; tell him that even in my last hour I know not whether he be king-born; but this I know of a surety: he it is whom God has chosen.

SIGRID.

I will bear him your greeting.

KING SKULE.

And yet another greeting must you bear. There dwells a penitent woman in the north, in Halogaland; tell her that her son has gone before; he went with me when there was great danger for his soul.

SIGRID.

That will I.

KING SKULE.

Tell her, it was not with the heart he sinned; pure and blameless shall she surely meet him again.

SIGRID.

That will I. [*Points towards the background.*] Hark! they are breaking the lock!

KING SKULE.

[*Points towards the chapel.*] Hark! they are singing loud to God of salvation and peace!

SIGRID.

Hark again! All the bells in Nidaros are ringing——!

KING SKULE.

[*Smiles mournfully.*] They are ringing a king to his grave.

SIGRID.

Nay, nay, they ring for your true crowning! Farewell, my brother, let the purple robe of blood flow wide over your shoulders; under it may all sin be hidden. Go forth, go into the great church and take the crown of life.

[*Hastens into the chapel. Chanting and bell-ringing continue during what follows.*

VOICES.

[*Outside the gate.*] The lock has burst! Force us not to break the peace of the church!

KING SKULE.

I come.

THE TOWNSMEN.

And the church-robber must come too!

KING SKULE.

Ay, the church-robber shall come too. [*Goes over to* PETER.] My son, are you ready?

PETER.

Ay, father, I am ready.

KING SKULE.

[*Looks upwards.*] O God, I am a poor man, I have but my life to give; but take that, and keep watch over Håkon's great king's-thought.—See now, give me your hand.

PETER.

Here is my hand, father.

KING SKULE.

And fear not for that which is now to come.

PETER.

Nay, father, I fear not, when I go with you.

KING SKULE.

A safer way have we two never trodden together. [*He opens the gate; the* TOWNSMEN *stand without with upraised weapons.*] Here are we; we come of our own free will;—but strike him not in the face.

[*They pass out, hand in hand; the gate glides to.*

A VOICE.

Aim not, spare not;—strike them where ye can.

KING SKULE'S VOICE.

'Tis base to deal thus with chieftains.

[*A short noise of weapons; then a heavy fall is heard; all is still for a moment.*

A VOICE.

They are dead, both of them!

[*The* KING'S *horn sounds*

ANOTHER VOICE.

There comes King Håkon with all his guard!

THE CROWD.

Hail Håkon Håkonsson; now have you no longer any foemen.

GREGORIUS JONSSON.

[*Stops a little before the corpses.*] So I have come too late! [*Enters the convent yard.*

DAGFINN.

It had been ill for Norway had you come sooner. [*Calls out.*] In here, King Håkon!

HÅKON.

[*Stopping.*] The body lies in my way!

DAGFINN.

If Håkon Håkonsson would go forward, he must pass over Skule Bårdsson's body!

HÅKON.

In God's name then!

[*Steps over the corpse and comes in.*

DAGFINN.

At last you can set about your king's-work with free hands. In there are those you love; in Nidaros they are ringing in peace in the land; and yonder he lies who was your direst foe.

HÅKON.

All men misjudged him, reading not his secret.

DAGFINN.

His secret?

HÅKON.

[*Seizes him by the arm, and says softly.*] Skule Bårdson was God's step-child on earth; that was the secret.

[*The song of the women is heard more loudly from the chapel; all the bells are still ringing in Nidaros.*

THE END.